

Notions: Make time for summer crafting. 5E
Top Drawer..... 2E
Antiques 5E
Scapes 10E
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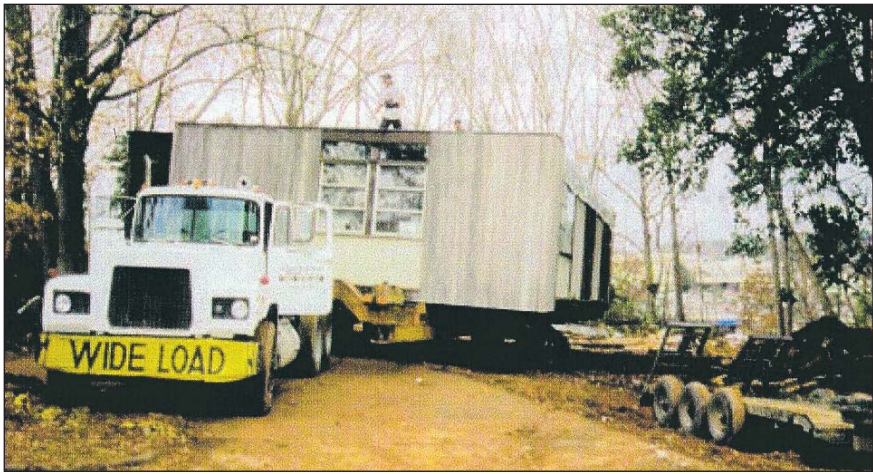
Home&Garden

Coming Sunday:
Find out how Raleigh's Riggins family is managing in the "Extreme Makeover" home. **SUNDAY JOURNAL**

home of the month

May's profile of a well-designed living space

Take a slide show tour of the home and hear architect Ellen Cassilly talk about it at www.newsobserver.com, search 'home.'



Today's Home of the Month is reviewed by Ken Friedlein, an architect and writer whose article on preserving the 1954 Poland House in Raleigh appeared in The News & Observer in August 2001. The column caught the eye of a Durham man who had recently hired a designer to do a modern house. With a phone call, he redirected the collaboration between homeowner and architect.

By KEN FRIEDLEIN
GUEST COLUMNIST

Ellen Cassilly clearly recalls the late summer day in 2001 when her client phoned with a piece of news he had read in the Sunday paper: Preservation North Carolina was looking for someone to buy, move and restore a remarkable but relatively inconspicuous Raleigh house designed in 1954 by N.C. State University Design School professor George Matsumoto. It had been the home of another faculty member, George Poland, who owned it until his death in 2000.

Cassilly, a Durham architect, was contemplating her own design for a residence for Don DeFeo, then general manager of the Washington Duke Inn. She recalls his enthusiastic voice on the phone. "Ellen, did you see the paper?" DeFeo asked. "We have to go see this

the project
the poland/defeo residence

architect
Ellen Cassilly
location
502 John Jones Road, Durham
year built | 1954
year moved | 2002
square footage
1,780 heated, 420 unheated
sales price | \$629,000
key design concept
honoring a midcentury masterpiece by remaining faithful to the original design

SEE **POLAND**, PAGE 4E

a modern movement



the renovation

The boxlike building designed by George Matsumoto in 1954 sits atop a concrete block foundation. The lower-level opens in the rear to a broad lawn, which leads to the woods and reservoir. Originally, the under-house space on the lower level was an open terrace and carport, designed by Matsumoto so that it might be later enclosed. Architect Ellen Cassilly finished the enclosure that Matsumoto had anticipated, turning the 1,200-square-foot Poland House into the 1,800-square-foot Poland-DeFeo House.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ELLEN CASSILLY

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Share your plans and upload your photos at share.triangle.com/gardenparty.



Doctor sows love into family garden

By VIRGINIA A. SMITH
THE PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER

PHILADELPHIA

Jules Vassalluzzo's gardens tumble and flow in entertaining harmony, one big bear hug of a landscape, with surprise and delight at every turn.

You'll find tree peonies next to hostas next to clematis next to hellebores next to strawberries, so many colorful plants and trees that something interesting is happening all year long.

"I'm an equal-opportunity plantsman," Vassalluzzo explains with a chuckle. "Whatever's free or cheap."

So he's no snob, though he studied biology and botany in college and is a veteran of the Philadelphia Flower Show. (His beloved wife, Rosemarie, who died in 2001, was a 14-time grand-sweepstakes winner there.)

"I just love gardening," he says. "Who wouldn't?"



Self-seeding Virginia Bluebells in the garden require little maintenance.

MCT PHOTO BY RON TARVER

He knows the origin and proper botanical name of every plant in his Langhorne gardens, which twice were on a garden tour.

But this is a private place, as well. Vassalluzzo says gardening allowed him to share precious, carefree time with his three children, and now his seven grandchildren.

"Oh," he says, "I could tell you stories." And he does, starting with how he fell in love with Rosemarie Pellegrino, a farmer's daughter from Bucks County, Pa., back when both were students at Temple, and how she wasn't much interested at first, but then ...

They married in 1962. She was a teacher, he was a family doctor, and their simple Colonial house had exactly two trees in the front yard and two trees in the back when they moved there in 1969.

Over time, the Vassalluzzos turned the front, back and side yards into a verdant expression of the life and values they shared: full, busy and bustling with children and grandchildren.

SEE **GARDEN**, PAGE 3E

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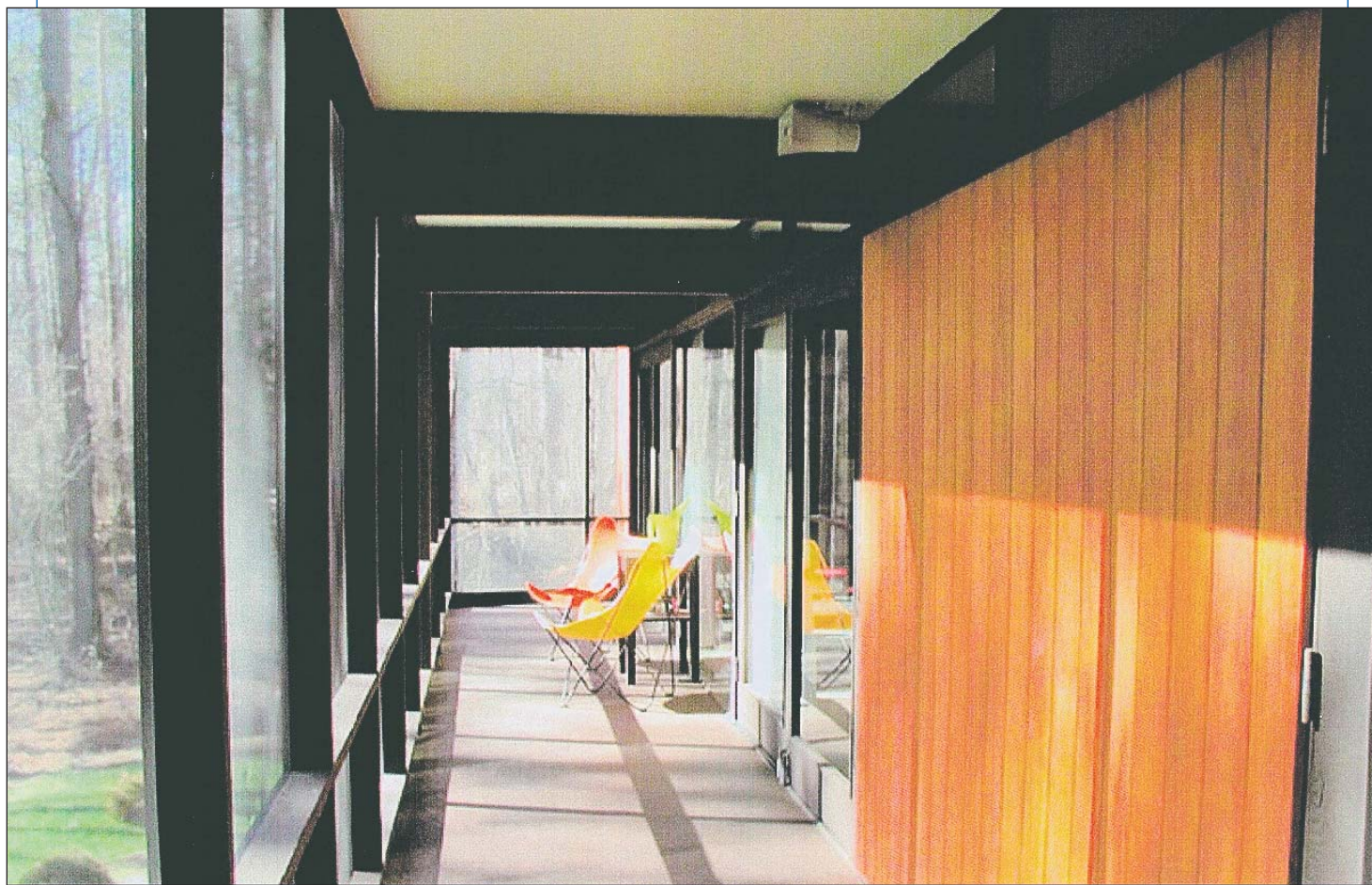
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the porch

The living room opens onto a 48-foot-long cantilevered porch, which makes an overhang that shades the lower level along the back of the house. Outside is a view of the grassy expanse behind the house, and the woods beyond. Cassilly meant for her additions to be in keeping with the original house.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ELLEN CASSILLY

POLAND

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1E

house.”

And so they went. In the 1980s and '90s, commercial buildings had crowded their way onto the slope overlooking what used to be the pastures of Crabtree Valley. Squeezed between those buildings, DeFeo and Cassilly saw, was one of the dozen or so houses that Matsumoto designed around Raleigh during his 13-year stint at NCSU's Bauhaus-inspired School of Design.

Matsumoto's houses are notable for their simplicity, rigor and residential interpretation of the International Style. It was the comfort and livability that got DeFeo's attention. “I was impressed by how clean and livable 1,200 square feet could be — two bedrooms, two full baths,” he says. “It was small space, but it was good-scaled space.”

With its airy L-shaped living and dining room opening onto a continuous 48-foot-long porch on the back of the house, “it made you feel you were in a larger place,” DeFeo says. He arranged to purchase the house and move it nearly 40 miles to 24 acres he found for sale on the edge of Little River Reservoir north of Durham.

A box on a hill

From the outside, the Poland house is most notable for its form and its siting. The boxlike building is supported by six 24-foot beams set 8 feet apart atop a concrete block foundation. The front of the foundation is mostly underground, but the slope of the land toward the back of the house allows the rear of the lower level to be open for its entire width onto a broad, grassy terrace. The result is a sun-filled living space that spills out of doors.

The house's upper floor is visually separated from the block foundation by a band of glass windows framed between the beams. A short flight of broad stairs with open risers affords an uninterrupted view of the glass band, so that, as DeFeo says, “the house floats.”

The Durham site slopes more gently than the original Crabtree Valley hillside, and the house had to sit a little higher above the natural grade. Cassilly carefully managed the taller foundation with berming and landscaping along the front. This preserved the house's close-to-the-ground floating effect. The sunny terrace behind the house leads to the woods and the reservoir beyond.

Originally, the under-house space on the lower level was an open terrace and carport, designed by Matsumoto so that it might be enclosed to create a studio or other living area. Cassilly designed the enclosure and finishing of this space, turning the 1,200-square-foot Poland House into the 1,800-square-foot Poland/DeFeo House.

The lower level studio apart-



the living room

Glass windows and doors are framed between the ceiling beams of the house in the upper-level L-shaped living room. The airy room is open to a dining area and kitchen. The door in the background leads to one of the two upper-level bedrooms.

ment features a south-facing wall of wood and glass arranged on the same spacing as the exposed structural members of the house. The main beams extend overhead to support the cantilevered upper level porch, making an overhang that shades the lower level.

Cassilly designed kitchen and bath cabinets that hang off the wall, rather than rest on the floor, taking a cue from Matsumoto's handling of built-in cabinets on the upper level.

She also designed a small deck off the front with open stairs down to the lower grade behind the retaining wall.

The additions, she says, were meant to be as unobtrusive as possible, and in keeping with the original house.

“The project was about saving a stalwart piece of architecture, a piece that was very much of its time and ahead of its time,” she says.

Rethinking the interior

In one departure from the house's original structure, DeFeo asked for the addition of a beam to span the studio's kitchen and living area without requiring a column in the middle of the space.

“I wanted to open the area up for art,” DeFeo explains.

Cassilly would have preferred to keep the column because the added beam blocks the otherwise unbroken view from the glass band at the front of the house through to daylight at the back.

DeFeo also considered adding an interior connecting stair between the two levels. He had visited Matsumoto in the architect's retirement house in Oakland, Calif., and Matsumoto showed him where a spiral stair might go.

In the end, DeFeo decided against it, choosing to keep the lower level as a separate apartment with its own entrance.

Looking back on his part in saving the Poland House, DeFeo recalls his reaction on first seeing

the advanced state of deterioration of the exterior of the house.

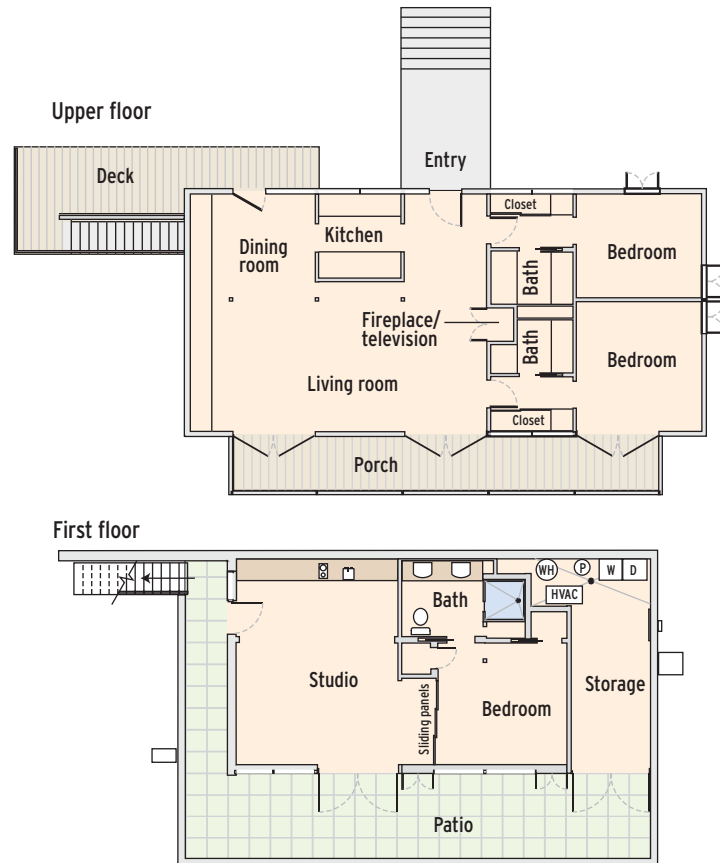
“There was a lot of work to do to preserve it,” he says, “but I really could see the wrecking ball” if he didn't try. The experience, he says, “is probably the highlight of my life as a person who appreciates the midcentury style.”

After retiring three years ago and deciding to split his time between California and southern Vermont, where he is building a

new home, DeFeo reluctantly decided this year to put the Poland/DeFeo house on the market. The asking price is \$629,000.

“It's not about the acreage,” he says of his search for a buyer. “It has to be somebody who appreciates the house. It's time to let somebody else who appreciates it have it.”

Ken Friedlein is an architect at Dixon Weinstein Architects in Chapel Hill.



the plan

The Poland house as originally designed by George Matsumoto was a clean, livable 1,200 square feet with room to expand. Ellen Cassilly's redesign made it an 1,800-square-foot dwelling with separate entrances for the two-bedroom upper level and the one-bedroom lower level.

Inquiries about the Poland/DeFeo house can be directed to Pat Bartee at Keller Williams Realty, 281-3251.