



Architects Charlie Myer and Don Knerr added interest to the Shingle-style facade with a handsome new Arts and Crafts entry, several new windows, and a pergola over the side and garage doors.

A FAMILY AFFAIR



Two busy parents and their lively brood love their Lexington, Massachusetts, house for the way it echoes the fun that's so much a part of their lives.

TEXT BY REGINA COLE | PHOTOGRAPHY BY SAM GRAY | ARCHITECTURE: CHARLES R. MYER & PARTNERS
INTERIOR DESIGN: ANDRA BIRKERTS | LANDSCAPE DESIGN: ROBERT HANSS LANDSCAPE CONSTRUCTION
BUILDER: S+H CONSTRUCTION | PRODUCED BY STACY KUNSTEL



THIS PAGE AND FACING PAGE TOP: The light style of early-twentieth-century Glasgow designer Mackintosh informs the dining and living rooms. FACING PAGE BOTTOM: In winter, it's a light-filled room; in summer, sans windows, it becomes a screened porch-like space. The light fixtures acknowledge that this is indoor-outdoor space.

This newly reconfigured Shingle-style house recalls a favorite old commercial jingle: nobody doesn't like it. In fact, the professionals who transformed what might have been called an ugly duckling into a swan recall the process with fondness, even delight. "My clients wanted a house that encompasses all the various parts of their lives," says Wellesley-based interior designer Andra Birkerts. "Both parents are busy professionals. They're active in the community, they are involved in their children's lives, they're athletes, and they love the out-of-doors. A lot of programs have to be met. I like that!"

The 10,000-square-foot house in the Boston suburb of Lexington presents a dormered facade to the street, but its new life is oriented toward the back garden, where the

site falls away via a series of landscaped terraces. The interior has stylish, sophisticated and comfortable spaces for entertaining, as well as secret hideaways, private fantasy spaces and play areas that are pure joy. Every room, porch, terrace and garden space is imbued with the personalities of the homeowners and their four children, ages two to nine.

"The land is what brought us here," explains the young wife and mother. "We looked and looked in Lexington, where we already lived, so that our children would not have to change schools. We kept coming back to this house because the back of the lot abuts conservation land, and the views are of nature."

While the couple loved almost everything about the house, they felt the kitchen needed some renovation. "It didn't feel child-friendly," says the homeowner. On the advice of friends, the family turned to the Cambridge architectural firm of Charles R. Myer & Partners. "Charlie



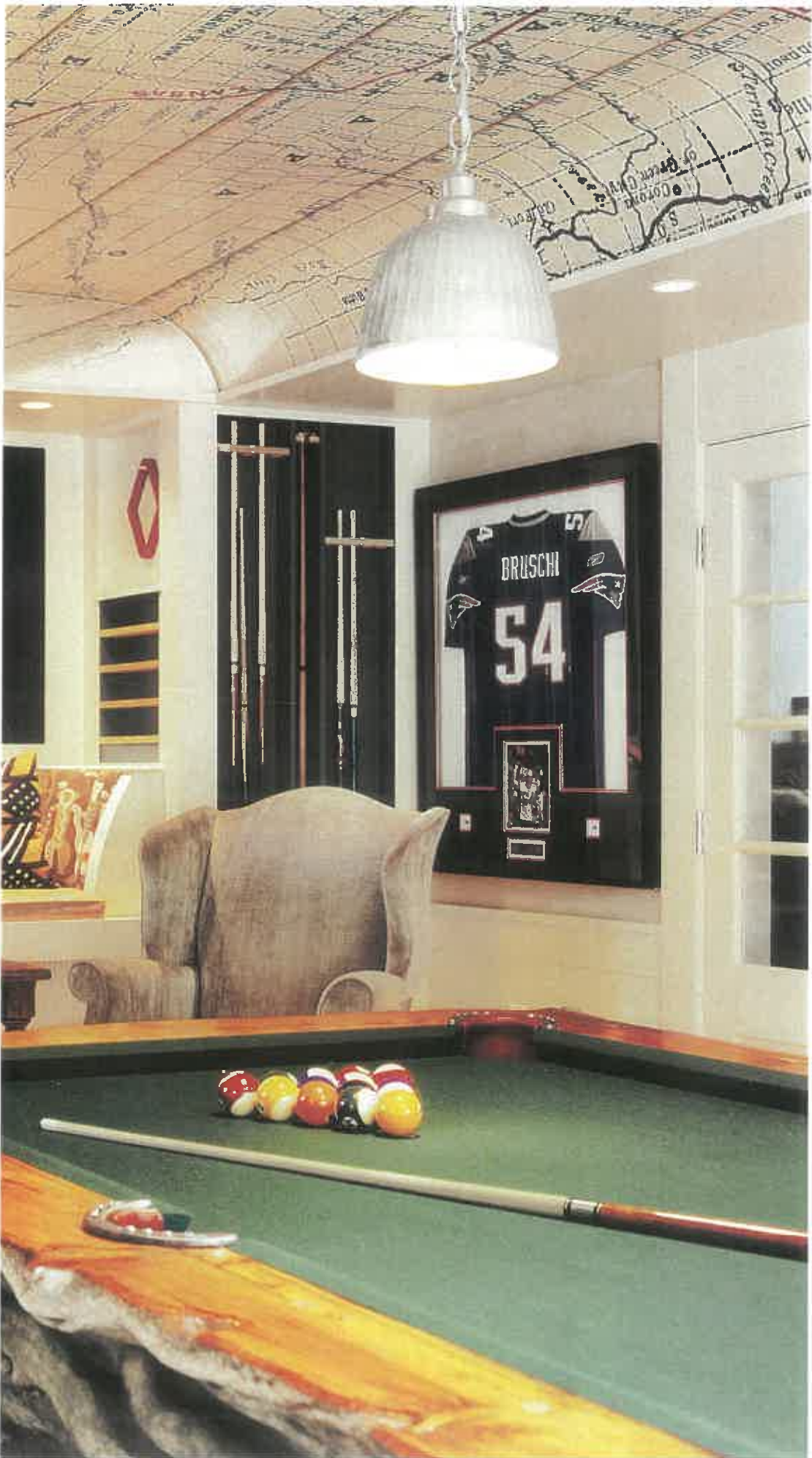
opened our eyes to the possibilities, and he and Don got us excited about what we could do," she says.

"They came to us because they wanted a simple kitchen renovation," says Don Knerr, one of the firm's architects. "The project kept expanding as their eyes got bigger." Although the house's envelope remained essentially the same, the interior was gutted and reconfigured.

The family was getting bigger, too, recalls John Ellis of the Cambridge building firm S+H Construction. "One day, as we were working, the clients asked whether the new laundry room was big enough to serve as a child's bedroom. That's how Don and I found out that they were expecting another child."

The original plan had called for three bedrooms; Myer and Knerr found space for an additional child's room above an existing bedroom, as a loft accessed via an ornate metal circular staircase. Similarly lighthearted elements abound throughout the house, among them a child-sized

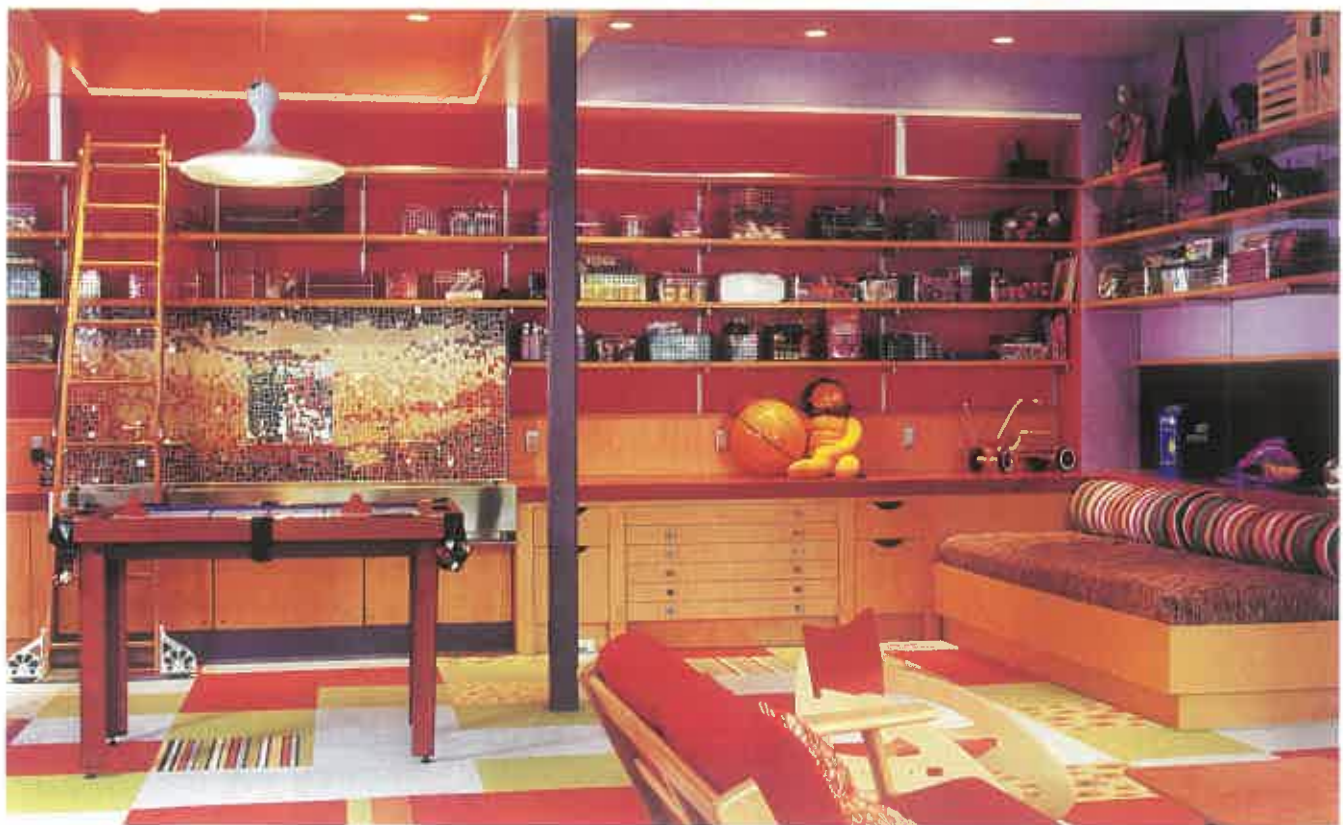




Fossils swim behind a raised banquette, sports memorabilia celebrates the home team, and the overhead map depicts a favorite part of Colorado. While prudent souls watch from comfortable wing chairs, pool sharks hustle at a table hand-crafted of ancient western trees, bearing horseshoes at the pockets.



Saturated, joyful color brightens a girl's bedroom and the downstairs playroom. **FACING PAGE:** In the master bedroom, the colors are subtle, sophisticated. Antiqued, patterned tiles add drama to a serene master bedroom.





secret passage that leads from a closet in an upstairs bedroom to a hidden space behind a hinged bookcase unit at the top of the back hall.

K nerr repeatedly uses the word “playful” when he describes this renovation process. “The exuberance of the children and their parents’ enthusiasm speaks from every room and spills into the landscape,” he says. “This couple has created places their children will always remember.”

The newly reconfigured formal entry joins the dining room via an arch and a pair of leaded-glass cabinets. Architectural elements in the dining room, including white-painted wainscoting, pay homage to early-twentieth-century Glasgow geniuses Charles Rennie Mackintosh and his wife, Margaret Macdonald. “The owners had lived in an American Craftsman house and liked the Arts and Crafts sensibility,” says Knerr, “but they wanted something lighter. Mackintosh has always been an interest of ours, and





here his transitional styling is wonderfully appropriate.”

Robin’s-egg blue at the back of a bookcase and a narrow matching pinstripe below the crown molding are the dining room’s only touches of bright color. The living room and kitchen, too, are serene, restful and furnished with simple, well-made artisanal objects.

Children’s spaces, however, are vibrant with saturated color. “We reversed the way in which color was used,” designer Birkerts says. “In the adult rooms, large surfaces are pale, with subtle accents of color in the recesses. In children’s rooms, it’s the opposite, especially in the playroom. There, very intense colors cover all the surfaces; the room fosters creativity.”

A basement playroom filled with art supplies and toy storage had always been in the plan, but an elevation change provided the opportunity to build a stage. “The kids love to put on shows for us while we sit in the audience,” the homeowner says with a smile.

She walks down the basement hall, where a billiard room boasts a massive pool table under a vaulted ceiling papered with a map of the Colorado area where the family likes to ski. “There’s room for adults to play, too,” she says.

The terraced garden is, like the interior, full of delightful surprises and areas of pure beauty. An herb garden sits conveniently near the house, a waterfall cascades down the levels and an expanse of lawn serves as a playing field; come winter, a hill provides for sledding and, at the lowest level, a pond freezes for ice skating. A checkered pattern on another lawn holds oversized chessmen in the summer.

“An especially lovely area is near the pond and waterfall, by the firepit,” says Robert Hanss, whose Chestnut Hill landscaping company spent nearly two years building stone walls and planting the two-acre lot. “I knew it was



The pond becomes a skating rink when it's cold. **BELOW:** The landscape holds a variety of hidden, secret areas for meditation, play or family gatherings. **FACING PAGE:** The extensive landscaping includes a walled herb garden near the kitchen door.



the perfect spot because that's where the crew would congregate to take their breaks. They always know where the sun is warmest, the view the nicest, the shelter from the wind the best."

As magical as the landscaping is, it all merges beautifully into its surroundings. "We used a lot of native plants to blend into the surrounding natural landscape," says Martin Lucyk of the landscaping company. "We used low- and high-bush blueberries, New England aster, tiarella, native geraniums, ferns and variegated Solomon's Seal."

Authenticity was essential for the homeowners, says Lucyk, pointing out an 1840 millstone on the central terrace. "It was important that it's real, not a reproduction."

As she dashes out the door, the homeowner pauses to look around. "I love the way the house now looks and works. But what's best of all," she adds, "is that I use every bit of space in this house." **NEH**

 For more information about this home see page 279.