

"We want a house that's not just a house, but an idea." With this comment Stine Dragsted, a journalist for Danish Broadcasting, and her husband Jens Kristensen, who works in international development, began a design dialogue with the firm of Carib Daniel Martin | architecture + design to rethink their Bethesda residence.

The home, situated just north of DC in Brookmont along the Potomac River, was a quaint 1930s painted-brick Colonial with a family room rear addition from the early '90s. Stine explained, "We fell in love with the soul of the house, but wanted to improve the flow and bring in more light."

The primary problem Carib's team needed to resolve was how to replace the clients' tiny kitchen with one that was more functional and less isolated. The kitchen had become the center of Jens' and Stine's family life, to allow it to flourish as such Carib proposed re-thinking the entire layout of the house. The existing kitchen, dining room, and family room were opened up and inter-connected and the kitchen was repositioned to the rear corner of the house at the crux between the new dining room and adjacent library sitting area.

"It clicked when we stopped seeing the kitchen as just a kitchen, and saw how it related to the space around it." Stine said. "Carib understood what we were trying to achieve. The over-sized kitchen island concept was the key."

In the process, Carib tucked a new powder room into a secluded alcove and reworked the circulation through the house. Other tweaks included redesigning the master bath with a large walk-in shower and floating trough-sink lavatory. An aluminum tube shelf, salvaged from a Danish train by Stine, was installed above the Duravit toilet and repurposed as a towel rack and hotelier.

Like the bathroom, the interior design of the residence was inspired throughout by Jens' and Stine's Danish heritage and the many artifacts collected during their recent two-year stay in Nigeria. "We didn't want the house to be over-designed." Stine said, "We wanted the space to do the talking."

The architect teamed with residential contractor Added Dimensions to help achieve the clients' personal style. The old trim work was replaced with new modern casing and the oak floors were subdued with a white stain and satin finish. As a counterpoint to the stark white interior, Carib exposed the steel beam and columns, required to open up the house to the old addition, and painted them an auburn orange.

The center piece of the re-imagined space, a large Corian-framed kitchen island, was created to float like a sculptural element paralleling the hand-hewn solid-log African bench anchored in the library sitting area. The dining room was furnished with white carved cabinets and a set of wood tables crafted by the same Nigerian carpenter along with dining chairs designed by Norman Cherner. Above the table hung three aluminum pendants fashioned by Stine's step-father, a Danish architect. A plethora of other African items were scattered throughout the space, including a set of butterfly paintings from the Nigerian artist Alimi Adewale.

The exterior of the original addition was modernized as well. A new window layout and siding pattern was installed with custom powder-coated mechanical vents centered over the main doors and three articulating Lampe Gras wall sconces, painted to match the steel structure, spaced between. Glass doors were inserted across the entire length of the back wall to bring in more light and offer a view to the new Ipe deck which extended, like a ship's prow, into the rear lawn. Bench seats were integrated into the deck's water-fall stair to allow for backyard hang-outs or impromptu plays.

Shortly after completing the renovation, Stine was unexpectedly tempted with an interesting job back in Denmark. After several weeks of fretting with her family, they decided to stay in Bethesda. "We finally had a house where everything fit in." Stine shared, "It was so personal - we wanted to wake up every day in our new home."