



# Naturally modern

weekend retreat brings the outdoors in

by rebecca haynes | photos by wendy carlson



**M**ichele and Larry Marsh wanted a weekend retreat that was an escape from the hectic pace of their weekday life in New York City. And since they already had family in Fairfield County — Weston to be exact — their dreams were answered when they found a ranch-style home on a wooded and secluded piece of property there, complete with a picturesque river running through the backyard. What followed turned into a nightmare, however, as they tried to make extensive renovations to bring more light into the home and create a more modern, open floor plan. The project sat in limbo until SWS Builders of Stamford stepped in and got things moving. Now the couple couldn't be happier with the end result.

Minimalist, sleek and modern — this



was the Marshes' vision. It seems almost a contradiction that visitors are surrounded by nature in such a setting, but that's exactly how they wanted it.

"The whole point of the house was to escape, to have serenity, feel calmness and the outdoors — when we're inside," says Michele Marsh. "Less is more and you have that sense of peace."

From the home's rich cedar siding to the Eastern feel of the stone pathway leading to a front door flanked by bamboo, the Marshes have created an oasis that couldn't be further from their more eclectic Greenwich Village apartment.

The butterfly roof, a key element to mid-century modern design, allows for higher ceilings and — because the Marshes chose to create a back wall of glass — lots more light into the house. "It took a while to get here," Marsh says of the design. "Initially we were just going to raise the roof but the butterfly design really keeps it open."

And the Asian touches spoke to her, she says. "Things happen organically and there needs to be a flow. I wanted the design to have a philosophy. We basically wanted a giant loft. Something we could keep as open as possible."

One area tailor-made for coziness, however, is the fireplace on the back deck. It can be enjoyed either from the loveseat adjacent to it or from the comfort of the master bedroom — thanks to the back wall of windows.

That back wall stretches the length of the house's main section — from the



family/TV room through the kitchen, dining room, living room and master bedroom suite. This area of the house also features an open floor plan.

“**W**hen you have a modern home it can sometimes feel cold,” Marsh admits, adding that she and her husband wanted their place to feel welcoming. So sharp lines are contrasted with textures and softness in the furniture and accessories, such as plush shag rugs and woven or furry soft pillows.

Artwork also was important to them and Marsh was pleased to fill most of the house with pieces by local artists. “I did have a few pieces already before I realized I wanted to go local,” she says. “But Fairfield County is rife with very talented artists so I really wanted that to be a theme throughout the house.”

The painting that hangs on the dining room wall, for instance, is one of a couple in the home done by artists from the Silvermine Artists’ Guild in New Canaan. “It changes color all day” depending on how



the light hits it, Marsh says. "And every-time I look at it something else pops out at me. It's just so serene."

The changing outdoor light may be the home's most spectacular piece of art as it casts shadows and spots of brightness along walls and on the porcelain tile floor, picked especially for their two Pugs, Monte (seen in the classic egg chair on the facing page) and Petunia.

"We chose it so the dogs' feet wouldn't scratch it and so people don't feel like they have to take off their shoes when they come in," Marsh says. "And furnishing the place has been wonderful."

She used no decorators to help, but relished the opportunity to let her artistic side shine after 15 years in investment banking. "I think I add something

every weekend."

In fact, she's so passionate about her aesthetic that she's created her own company, Devi Home Design LLC, and hopes to do more interiors as she and her husband work on starting a family.

Decorating is very personal, she says. "This is where you live. It's your sanctuary."

Her philosophy is simple and definitely comes through. "You don't need a lot, so you figure it out and then you deal with it. You want to make your life simple and peaceful."

And although this is the Marshes' weekend home, Michele says they find themselves spending more and more time there. "In the city it's all about running and running. Here it's all about connecting." @



