

SHADY AVE

April 23, 2014

Dear Ron,

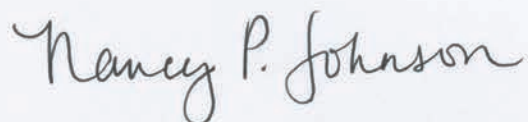
I wanted you to have a copy of the summer edition of *Shady Ave* "hot off the press," as they say, and I send it with my deepest thanks to you for reaching out to me about Laurel and David Rosenberg's house and making arrangements for us to feature it in the magazine.

Our readers, I know, will enjoy seeing it as much as I did, and I hope I was able to fully and accurately convey their passion for both the house and its grounds.

Thank you, also, for taking time to talk with me and share your vision for their property. You are clearly quite masterful at what you do, and I'm delighted to be able to highlight your efforts.

It was a pleasure working with you on this story, and I look forward to the possibility of featuring more of your clients' houses in the future.

Sincerely,

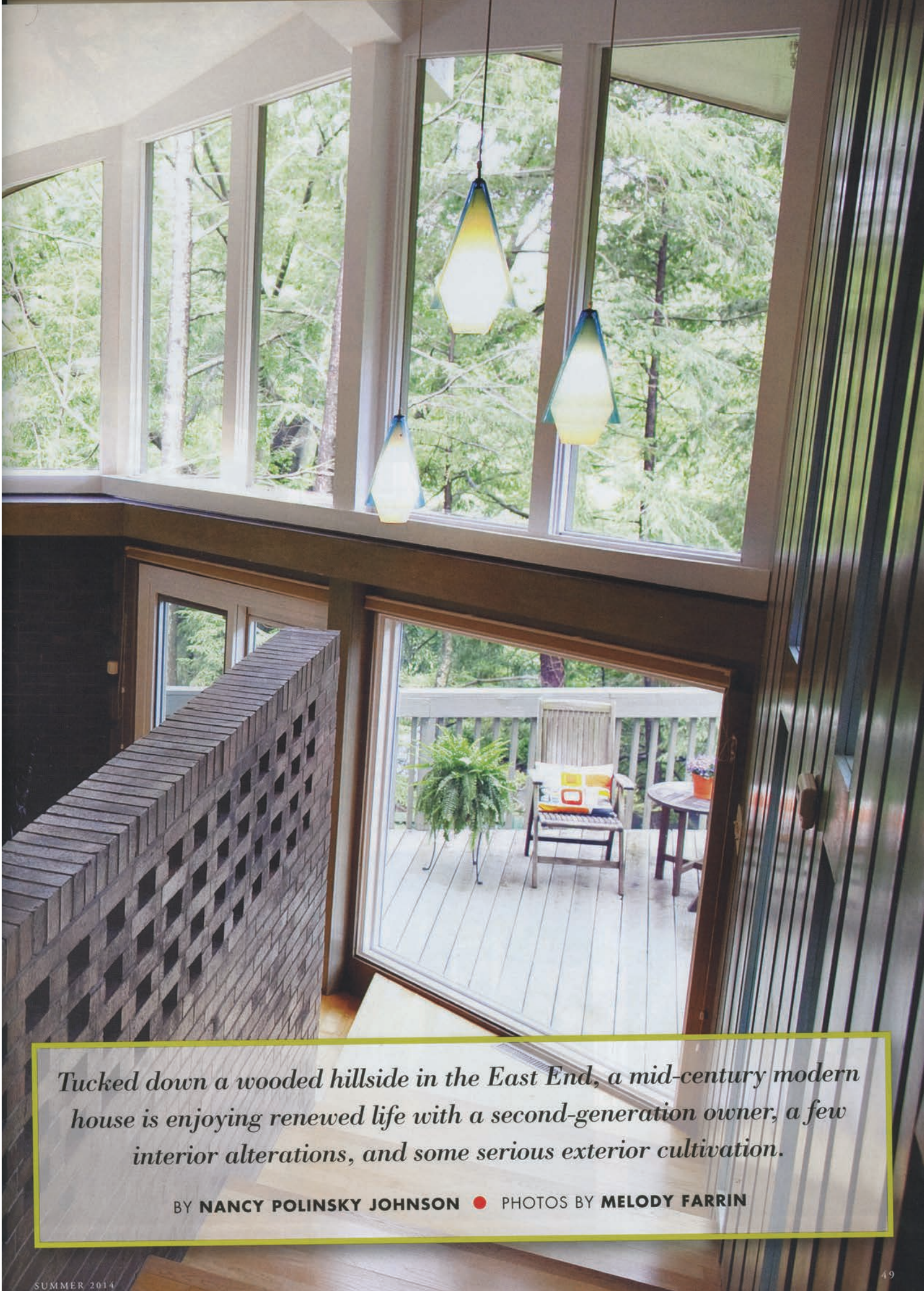


Nancy Polinsky Johnson
Publisher & Editor

A Better Home GG Gardens



Stairs from the front entry hall lead along an interior brick wall down to the living room below in David and Laurel Rosenberg's 1960s home. The brick and the cypress wood on the wall to the right are the same materials used on the exterior of the house.



Tucked down a wooded hillside in the East End, a mid-century modern house is enjoying renewed life with a second-generation owner, a few interior alterations, and some serious exterior cultivation.

BY **NANCY POLINSKY JOHNSON** ● PHOTOS BY **MELODY FARRIN**



David Rosenberg lived in a fabulous house growing up. And he lives in an even more spectacular home today. They just happen to be one and the same.

Designed by noted Pittsburgh architect Tasso Katselas in the late 1950s—he would later go on to design such landmark projects as Pittsburgh International Airport and the Carnegie Science Center—the house sits nestled beneath trees on a hillside where Shadyside meets Squirrel Hill. It features many of the hallmarks of mid-century modern architecture—a mostly flat roof with a few low-angle slopes, large windows and sliding glass doors, a carport, and an integration with nature—and from the street, it appears to be a sprawling single-story ranch home.

But once a visitor steps through the purple front door—“I wanted something bright and

was in my purple phase at the time,” explains David’s wife, Laurel—drama unfolds down a flight of stairs. There, a spacious living room is awash in sunlight that pours through windows rising, at one point, more than two stories high and lining two sides of the room. Exposed brick on some walls combines with cypress panels on another to reflect the same materials used on the exterior of the house, while multi-level decks and a large patio, all visible through the windows, seem to expand the boundaries of the space right into the woods outside.

“This is really my favorite room in the house,” says Laurel. “It changes with the seasons; it’s like you’re sitting outdoors.”

The room—and much of the rest of the house—could serve as a set for a scene from *Mad Men*, as David and Laurel have furnished much of it with pieces that either date back to



Top: The house, designed by Tasso Katselas, features a front garden that is defined by an arcing brick wall. In the summer it is abloom with flowers and glass sculptures by South Side artist Drew Hine (above).



Homeowners Laurel and David Rosenberg with their dog, Rosta, and a visiting canine friend.



While soaring windows command attention on one end of the living room, a massive brick fireplace and chimney create a strong focal point on the other side.

A Better Home & Gardens



In this photo, taken in the early '60s, David (right) stands with his brother, George, and his parents, Jeanette and Harvey Rosenberg, in front of the living room fireplace. Both the tapestry hanging in the background and the andirons are still in place today.

the mid-century modern era or were inspired by it. And their love of glass art—evidenced even before you enter the house by sculptures in their front garden—is reflected by a colorful array of glass pieces mounted on a wall at the far end of the room.

David was 4 years old when his parents, who now live in Fox Chapel, purchased the house in 1961, and he recalls the living room usually being off-limits to him and his older brother.

“It had white wool carpeting,” he explains.

So when he and Laurel took over ownership in 2000—with children ages 8, 9, and 12—he knew what to do.

“I wanted to make it livable, more family-friendly,” he says. “We put a hardwood floor in here.”



Glass pieces by Drew Hine can be found throughout the house, including these works mounted on a wall of the living room. In contrast to the smooth glass, certain bricks in the wall project to create a textured pattern in that area.

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Marilyn Monroe during the filming of *The Misfits*, 1960 © Eve Arnold/Magnum Photos

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The dining table sits in front of a large fireplace adorned with copper panels. In the background, classic Eames lounge chairs create another seating area just steps down from the living room.

Making the house more livable also meant undertaking a renovation, which today usually means tearing down a few walls. But in the Rosenberg's case, it meant putting *up* a few.

"There were no walls in this house, no private space to do work," says David, an attorney at Weber Gallagher, who needed to be able to close a door and handle legal matters while at home. "So we turned the kitchen into an office."

He and Laurel then reconfigured the remaining lower level space, which had been a dining area situated four steps down from the living room and flowing right into an open family room. They built a new kitchen in the old family room and shifted the dining area over. That made room for a casual sitting space off the living room where two Eames lounge chairs and ottomans—iconic pieces of Modern design—fit perfectly.

Furnishings in the dining area are more "eclectic" than Modern, says Laurel and include a farmhouse table with decorative legs and a carved wooden cabinet that is a family piece. The focal point of the space is a massive copper-faced fireplace that makes for cozy fire-side dining in the winter.

On warm-weather days, a small atrium off the dining area provides a charming spot for a meal.

"This space reminds me of New Orleans or Charleston [S.C.]," says David.

The atrium, like the lower level of the house, sits one floor below the ground level of the front yard. It is enclosed on one side by

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Like the house, the atrium outside the dining area and kitchen is carved into the hillside property. The ground level of the front yard is at the top of the brick wall visible in the background.

windows that offer a view from within and on the other sides by brick walls rising up to the front garden. Laurel, a passionate gardener—"I'd do AstroTurf if it was up to me," jokes David—worked closely with landscape designer Ron Kotcho to find the right plants for the intimate space.

"This is a tough culture for plants," says Kotcho of the atrium. "It's low light, it's moist. It's been a lot of trial and error."

He and Laurel ultimately created a Zen-like garden, using pea gravel, a water feature, and a statue of Buddha to set the tone. Plants including rose bushes and a sweetbay magnolia add more than just color. "I wanted to scent the area, and I knew a sweetbay would do that," explains Kotcho.

"The scent is just incredible," Laurel affirms.

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The Rosenbergs renovated the house more than a decade ago, building this open galley kitchen and eating area where a family room had been. It flows directly from the dining area, so all of the pottery and glass pieces on display shelves (inset) can be seen throughout the entire space. Tile & Designs in Shadyside found floor tiles to match the original tiles installed when the house was built.



The atrium is visible through floor-to-ceiling windows in the breakfast area, which also looks out onto a back deck, so the space is filled with natural light all day. In the center, a custom-made table is topped with the same granite used on countertops in the adjoining galley kitchen, and, again, no walls or doors impede the flow from one space to another.

Joseph Kelly of Kelly Custom Furniture & Cabinetry in Lawrenceville created the wood cabinets in the kitchen.

"The open-glass display cabinets work very well, because they're seen from the eating area," he says. "And there are open shelves to show off Laurel's beautiful pottery and glassware."

His choice of cherry wood for the cabinets was not random.

"They speak to all the woodlands around the house that you see out the window," he says. "There's actually a lot of cherry on the property."

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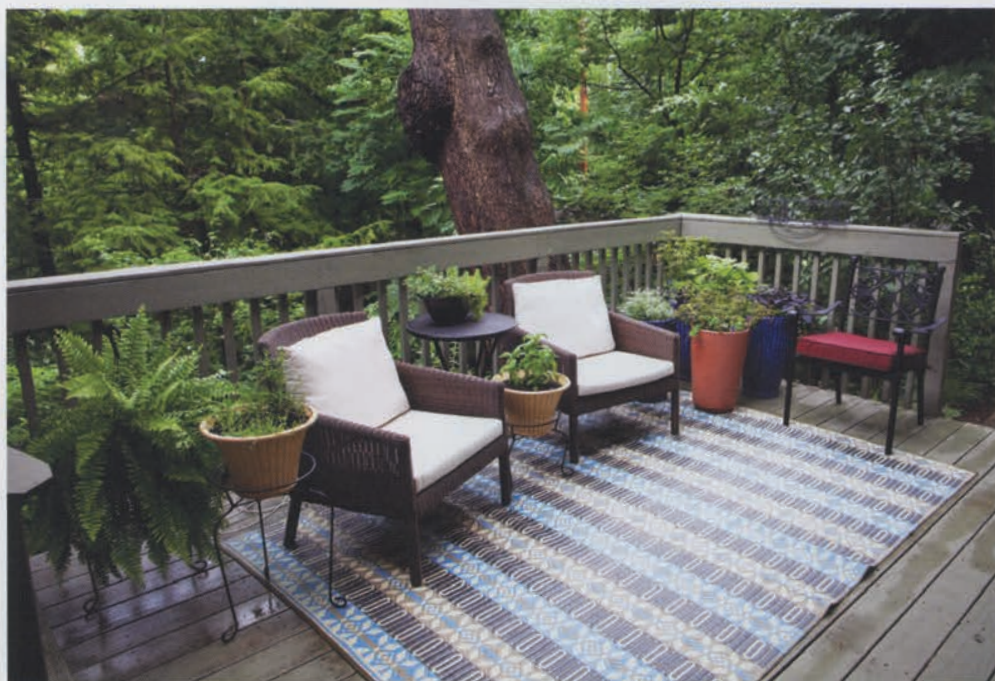
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When they built their kitchen, the Rosenbergs also built this adjoining deck, which they connected by staircase to an existing deck above. They use it often during the summer, and Laurel, an avid cook, grows herbs in pots here.

There's a lot nature of all sorts on the property.

"We have red-tail hawks that come back to a nest every year," says Laurel. "We have deer, wild turkey, and, unfortunately, a ground hog. We have amazing migratory birds. They're beautiful, and they stop here. And we have six 150-year-old oak trees."

Laurel often takes in all the natural beauty around her from the back deck that she and David added when they constructed the kitchen.

"This is my spot," she says. "I'll come out here to read or have a cup of coffee."

The deck provides a perfect vantage point to appreciate all the work that Kotcho did to tame the landscape on the steeply sloping backyard below.

"The yard was useless before," says David.

"Basically, you were looking out on woods, and there's nothing wrong with that," says Laurel. "But we wanted to create a nicer space."

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From the deck above the backyard, recent improvements to the landscape can be easily seen, including stone steps made from old Belgian block street curbs.

That meant removing a few trees, bringing in some new plants, and moving other things around—all with the goal of creating a relaxed woodland area with opportunities to walk and sit.

According to Kotcho, the landscaping plan began with the design of the house.

“I knew what the architect was trying to do—marry it into the hillside,” observes Kotcho. “So my goal was to continue that by visually doing the garden this way.”

To ease access down the hill, Kotcho installed steps made of large, repurposed Belgian blocks.

“They’re old curbs—street curbs,” he says. “They are incredible, and I love the way they look as a garden step.”

Kotcho also tackled the landscape along the front and side of the house, enhancing the view from the patio where the Rosenbergs do much of their summer entertaining.



Like David’s parents who owned the home before them, David and Laurel enjoy using this patio on the side of the house for entertaining. It’s where they had their rehearsal dinner when they married nearly 30 years ago.



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In the master bedroom, furniture built by Joseph Kelly of Kelly Custom Furniture & Cabinetry makes maximum use of the space.

David and Laurel look down on that patio from their bedroom suite, which includes an adjoining bath. And while modest in size by today's master suite standards, it makes maximum use of space with a built-in combined headboard and shelving unit with matching dressers. As he did with the kitchen cabinets, Kelly worked closely with the Rosenbergs to create the bedroom furnishings.

"They're a great couple, and they have a great sense of design," he says.

David can probably credit that to growing up in a certain special house. SA



The bathroom in the master suite was reconfigured as part of the renovation the Rosenbergs did when they took over the house. Like every other room in the home, it is filled with natural light.