

Home: Style makers bring pizzazz to interior design

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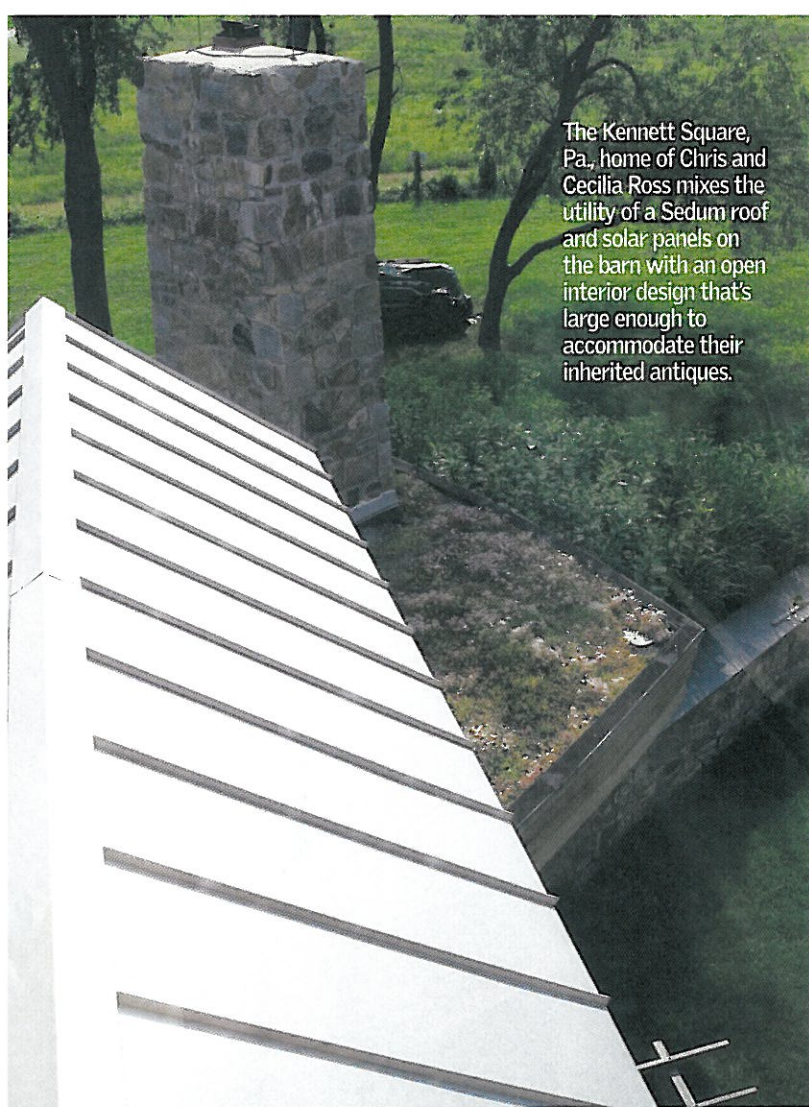
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inthehome

Chris and Cecilia Ross once lived across the field from a split-level that Cecilia dubbed "the ugliest house in Chester County." Today, the property is home to one of the county's most intriguing homes, a cutting-edge example of sustainable architecture.



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The Kennett Square, Pa., home of Chris and Cecilia Ross mixes the utility of a Sedum roof and solar panels on the barn with an open interior design that's large enough to accommodate their inherited antiques.



wells in the backyard. Rainwater from the barn is used to flush toilets and irrigate native and low-maintenance plants.

And the ugliest house? The foundation was turned to rubble used during the construction.

Cecilia and Chris, a Pennsylvania state representative, had long been interested in preserving and protecting the environment. "I figured we had a chance when we were building to go green," she says.

It wasn't easy. The house, which they moved into in 2005, took nine months to plan and two years to build.

"It was a very challenging project," says Matthew Moger, a principal with Lyman Perry Architects in Berwyn. "Five years ago, it was much more difficult to get the mechanical systems."

At 4,200 square feet, the four-bedroom house is not what Cecilia Ross had initially envisioned. She wanted a cozy cottage in which to soothe her "inner cat," she says. But the family also wanted a separate area for their son and daughter. And they wanted an eat-in kitchen. They also needed a social space for her husband, who, as part of his job, frequently entertains.

The solution is a house with distinct spaces: a billiard room/recreation room at one end for the kids, a center section for entertaining, and a space to house the kitchen, family room with fireplace and upstairs master bedroom and bath.

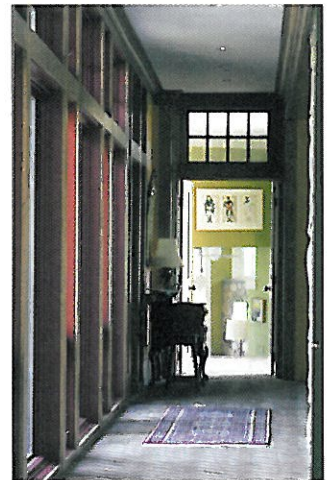
Most the family's time is spent in the family-room area, which resembles a modern farmhouse, complete with metal roof.

Although outfitted with the latest stainless-steel appliances, the kitchen would suit the 200-year-old nearby farmhouse the family previously occupied. The vintage mood is fostered by transom windows, a farmer's sink, soapstone countertops, oak floors and the built-in cupboards that Moger, a furniture designer, crafted.

Moger also designed the table, from which the family can view the barn, their horses and three dogs, who cavort on the patio.

Outside, a stone wall juts from where the farmhouse adjoins the three-story, barn-like section like a relic from an old farm. The wall marks the division between public and private space. To provide continuity, concrete columns march downward from the front door to wrap around the kitchen, where they support an L-shaped pergola.

Moger oriented the house to take advantage of sun and westerly breezes. "In the summer solstice, the whole front of the house is in the shade," Cecilia says. "In the winter solstice, it is in the sun."



old, new and green

The design for a Kennett Square house incorporates history, style and utility

Story by **PAM GEORGE**
Photographs by **MATTHEW JONAS**

Chris and Cecilia Ross once lived across the field from a split-level that Cecilia dubbed "the ugliest house in Chester County." "It was absolutely repulsive," she recalls.

So when the Kennett Square, Pa., house went up for sale, she wasn't surprised that it lingered on the market, despite the two-acre property's meadow views. With the intent to tear down the house and rebuild, the couple purchased it and rented it out for five years.

Today, the property is home to one of the county's most intriguing homes, a cutting-edge example of sustainable architecture.

The barn is outfitted with solar panels, which provide up to 70 percent of the home's electricity needs. There are three geothermal

architecture

A floor-to-ceiling glass wall at the entrance welcomes sunlight in winter and lets it warm the brick floor of an open corridor. The light then trips down the wide stairs to reach the farthest area of the sunken living room.

The sun's passage was the driving force behind the overhanging curves and swoops in the center roofline, which peaks upward like a ship's prow. The pitch serves as a spout for heat exhaust.

Throw open the doors to the billiard room and cooling breezes circulate upward, assisted by stairs sans risers, to the third floor, where they drift out the top. The design truly works. On a warm summer day, the third floor studio where Cecilia crafts miniature room scenes was cooler than the second floor.

In winter, mechanical systems harness the hot air and push it down to heat the house. Also in winter, the family can close off the billiard room.

Most rooms are intimately sized. The exception is the combined dining room and living room. Painted the color of acorn squash, the room is a repository for the couple's antiques, including the Federal table and sideboard that had belonged to Chris' family, and the breakfast and sofa Cecilia inherited from her family.

"I told Matthew that we were not going to buy new furniture for this house," Cecilia says. "He had to accommodate it."

Moger also accommodated the couple's art collection by providing enough wall space, even with the open design.

Accommodation is also true when it comes to living a sustainable lifestyle, he says. You can't run a dishwasher during peak hours just because you have solar panels. "They have to learn to live with their house." Considering the Rosses' house, that learning process should be a pleasure.



Cecilia Ross sits in the garden with the family dogs.

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