

# THE NEW MODERN

WITH THE HELP OF PHILADELPHIA  
DESIGNER MONA ROSS BERMAN,  
A YOUNG FAMILY TAKES A 1907  
CHESTNUT HILL HOUSE FROM EMPTY  
SHELL TO UTTERLY SPECTACULAR  
(AND KID-FRIENDLY!).

BY EMILY GOULET • PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEFFREY TOTARO • STYLING BY LAUREN PAYNE

From the outside, the house looked lovely—a grand stone facade, a carriage house with ivy snaking up its walls, a spacious back terrace featuring a wisteria-covered pergola and a pool. The inside, though, was a different story. The owner had fallen into financial trouble in the midst of a massive renovation, leaving most of the interior a mere shell and the house in foreclosure.

Many people would have seen the house and promptly turned on their heel. A Grey Gardens–esque display of faded splendor, the 6,500-square-foot home didn’t have any bathrooms, plumbing or even a single sink. But when a young real estate developer saw it in 2009, he pounced (and *then* called his pregnant wife to let her know he’d just bought a house). He

knew what he was doing: He had a building background, his wife had a knowledge of design (she works at the Philadelphia Museum of Art), and, most important, they had the phone number of Mona Ross Berman, a Philadelphia-based designer with a great eye and a strong stomach for even the most needy spaces.

The couple closed on the house in seven days, hired Berman immediately, and completed the renovation in six months. The result: a bright, uncluttered home that is equal parts sophisticated and family-friendly. (The couple has two boys, six and three, and more on the way.) Here, ornate dentil moldings easily hold court with shiny lacquered surfaces, iconic Mid-Century Modern pieces make perfect sense amongst more classic items, and a could-be-stuffy front parlor doubles as a racetrack for serious scooter derbies.

From the outside, the house looks even more lovely than it did before. And now the inside finally matches—which only proves that sometimes, when it comes to buying a house, all you really need is plenty of courage, blind ambition, a bit of spontaneity—and the phone number of a very, very good designer.



LAVENDER FIELDS

(opposite) The dining room is awash in Benjamin Moore’s Majestic Mauve, a pale lavender that Berman extended over the millwork—a more modern approach than traditional contrasting trim. A glam mix of metals includes vintage Milo Baughman chairs (reupholstered in a high-quality faux leather for durability), a vintage Gino Sarfatti chandelier from OLC in Philadelphia, and a mantel of copper curiosities. (this page) Stephane Couturier’s *Barcelona* photograph hangs above a high-gloss buffet custom-designed by Berman. (previous spread) The master bedroom features a serene sitting area anchored by a Saarinen womb chair and a Tibetan silk rug.



#### MODEL KITCHEN

In the kitchen, modern amenities and furnishings (custom cabinetry, Shin and Tomoko Azumi's LEM Piston stools, Alvar Aalto pendant lights) are a sleek counterpart to warm Brazilian-soapstone countertops and traditional elements like the arched double doors, original to the home. The back of the kitchen functions as a butler's pantry, with a second dishwasher, a wine refrigerator and additional storage. (opposite) A cozy breakfast nook at the far end of the kitchen features a custom banquette. Berman sheathed it in a punchy Duralee fabric that she had laminated for wipe-ability. Candid photographs of the children at the Art Museum hang above, and built-in shelves display a collection of antique bottles.



#### A GRAND ENTRANCE

(this page and opposite, top) The entry of the home boasts eclectic, era-spanning furnishings: a black-lacquered Shaker-style bench, a Saarinen tulip table, an antique Edwardian chair, a Deco convex mirror and a Louis XIV-style commode. The clean walls act as a gallery for the couple's art collection, but the space still sees its share of fun. "We listen to '70s rock and the boys go crazy on their scooters, looping around the table. My wife and I didn't want a museum-type home," the homeowner says. (opposite, bottom) In the living room, modern pieces—a Noguchi coffee table, Jens Risom for Knoll chairs, and a leather sofa from Design Within Reach—contrast with a patchwork Oriental rug from Maloumian in Mount Airy, while a Louis XIV chair upholstered in a purple chevron fabric adds pattern.





#### LIFE IN BLOOM

One of the owners of the house during the '80s was a devoted gardener who meticulously planned extensive plantings. The homeowners have since discovered her detailed illustrations and charts of blooming periods for the entire property. Scrolled orange chairs (a providential Anthropologie find) add a dash of whimsy, while white Richard Schultz patio furniture mirrors the sleek interior design. (above) The tiered backyard allows those on the upper terrace to look out at the lower-level saltwater pool.