



BY RICHARD BUCHANAN

“You’ve done some good work,” said the Scholls, “but we know you can do better.” The four of us—my partner, Peter Archer, and I, and Mr. and Mrs. Scholl—were huddled over our early sketches of their home-to-be. “It’s attractive, but too ... ordinary,” Mrs. Scholl said.

The path from ordinary to the one-of-a-kind house we ended up with wasn’t always clear. But with the Scholls’ encouragement and their almost parentlike role as advisers, Peter and I were nudged out of our traditional colonial-centric comfort zones into a home checkered with playful asymmetry.

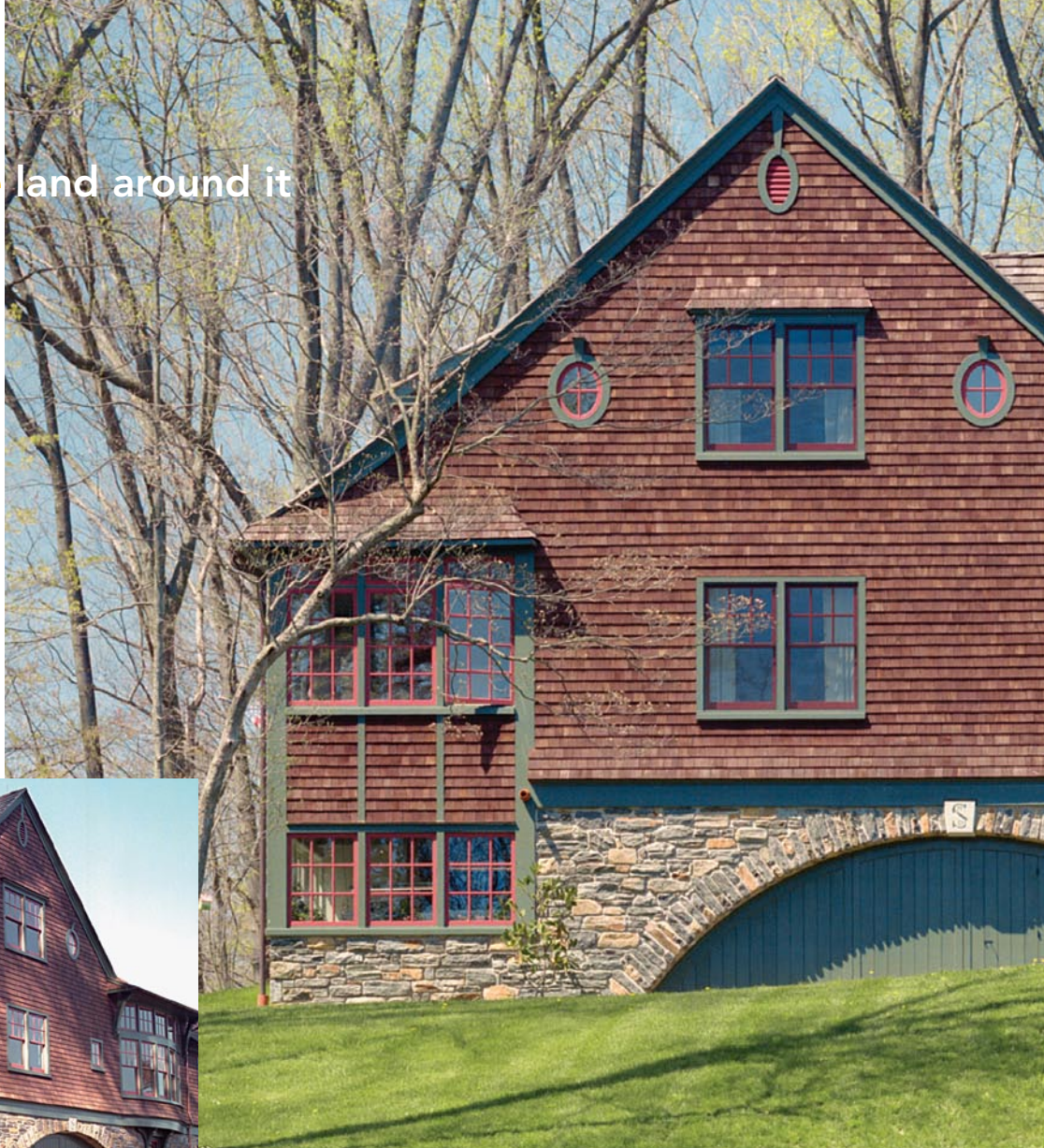
Taking cues from the rolling Pennsylvania countryside, we rounded out the strong horizontal and vertical lines of our early designs with more curves. But we gained our greatest measure of design inspiration by circling back to the Scholls’ memories of vacations in New York’s Adirondack region. We blended massive wooden brackets and timeless stonework, characteristic of the Adirondack style, with

Adirondack Shingle Style

Curves and a comfortable floor plan reinterpret two traditional styles

Adirondack style grew out of the land around it

In the late 19th century, an enduring American residential style quietly emerged in the woods of the Adirondack Mountains in New York. Made from the very landscape upon which they were built, Adirondack-style houses were quirky and rustic, with stone foundations, birch-bark paneling, and stair railings made of carefully intertwined branches. Their big roofs said shelter in a big way, and their screened porches and stone patios said relax.



A house that looks like it grew there. An arch of local stone supports the gable end of this home, which has shingles of stained cedar and a roof that's weathered gray. Spanish-cedar millwork painted red and dark green complements the landscape. Photo above taken at B on floor plan; photo left taken at C.

Among the signature Adirondack details incorporated into this house are:

- A masonry foundation made of local stone.
- Exposed and even decorative structural details such as massive brackets, posts, and beams.
- Broad overhangs and porches to protect the foundation from the elements.
- Buildings connected by covered walks.

the shingle style's tendency toward less formal yet exemplary craftsmanship. (For more about the Adirondack style, see the sidebar at left.)

At the Scholls' house, the shingle style is marked by sweeping rooflines, asymmetrical shapes, roof and sidewall shingles, and imaginative window placement. In addition, we brought curves to the interior of the house by connecting the public and private areas with arched openings.

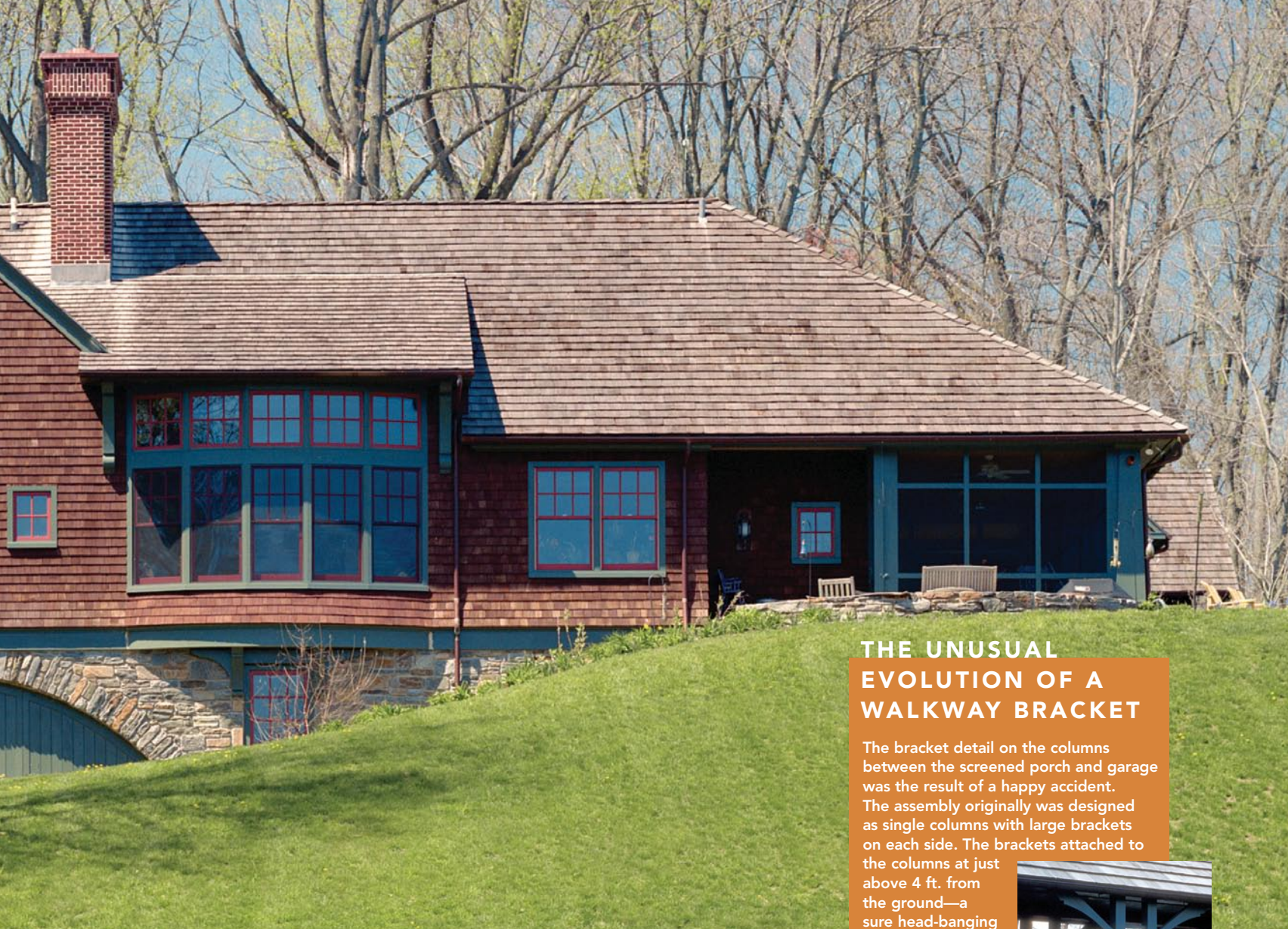
A gently rolling site inspires curves in the home's design

One of the first challenges we met was fitting the house to the site. The property is equal

parts woods and rolling meadow, and the south-facing site falls 9 ft. in elevation over a distance of about 30 ft.

We worked with the existing grade by situating the longer, lower section of the house on the high side of the property. As the land rolls downward, a two-story gable rises on a bridgelike stone arch (photos above). It's one of the first things you see as you drive toward the house.

The stone arch is one of many curved shapes that are played against the home's predominantly straight lines. Curves in the patio walls, the bow window, and even the oval windows at the gable tops set the house apart, giving it a stylistic signature. With no



THE UNUSUAL EVOLUTION OF A WALKWAY BRACKET

The bracket detail on the columns between the screened porch and garage was the result of a happy accident. The assembly originally was designed as single columns with large brackets on each side. The brackets attached to the columns at just above 4 ft. from the ground—a sure head-banging opportunity. Dissatisfied with several revisions, we stumbled onto an interesting pattern by laying one drawing over another and then separating or misaligning the two columns. Between the columns, the brackets crossed. We dropped the outermost brackets. The result is an attractive design that poses no threat to the heads of passersby. Inset photo taken at D on floor plan.



horizontal or vertical trim, oval windows work particularly well near the rake.

Rooflines and big brackets play a prominent role

The most important element in defining the shape of this house is the roof. Running perpendicular to the main gable is a longer subordinate ridge, which ends in a gently sloping hip roof over the screened porch. A smaller shed roof covers the bow window. Although they're not symmetrical, the hierarchy of roof shapes—a punctuated gable followed by a lower straight ridge ending in a sloping hip—works well because the roof's outline mirrors the sloping site.

At the front entrance, an alcove capped by a smaller gable steps back, creating an opportunity for a barrel-vaulted ceiling (photo p. 67, taken at A on floor plan). Protected from the weather, visitors are surrounded by an

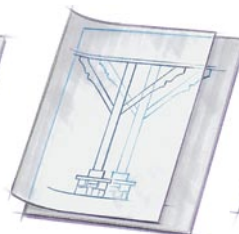
ensemble of welcoming shapes, textures, and colors: a curved ceiling with cove lighting; a smooth-paneled Arts-and-Crafts-style door; gray flagstones underfoot; dark-stained cedar shingles; dark-green Spanish-cedar trim; and stained glass lit warmly from within.

Massive brackets are common details on Adirondack-style houses. In the Scholl house, they range from large to very large and change shape depending on their location and implied strength. Just above and to the right of the stone arch are two examples: a larger pair of brackets supporting the roof over the bow window, and a smaller pair on the window below.

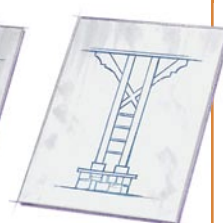
Another opportunity for brackets arose in the supports for the covered walk connecting the



Original



Eureka!



Success



Arches serve as graceful transitions from public to private spaces. The foyer, crowned by a parabolic arch over the office (right), is the common connector for the dining room, family room, and library. Leading from an arched doorway in the garage (above), a covered walk connects with a screened porch at the far end. Photo above taken at E on floor plan; photo right taken at F.

garage to the screened porch. Almost by accident, we happened upon a unique bracket design while working at the drawing board (sidebar p. 69).

Curves connect the interior parts of the house

Curved details occur in conspicuous places, not only on the exterior of the house but on the interior as well. Arched openings between rooms are an effective way of applying this tactic. The foyer amplifies the curvy look with a vaulted ceiling over Mrs. Scholl's office overlook that floats like a sheet held aloft in the wind (photo above).

The family room illustrates a couple of other, less obvious ways to work curves into the fabric of a house. The big bay window overlooking the view to the south bulges

outward, creating a faceted collection of windowpanes and the opportunity for a gently curving window seat that guides the eye toward the keyed-archway passage to the master bedroom. On the same wall, the flanks of the fireplace sweep inward in opposing curves toward the brick-lined firebox.

A flexible plan looks to the future

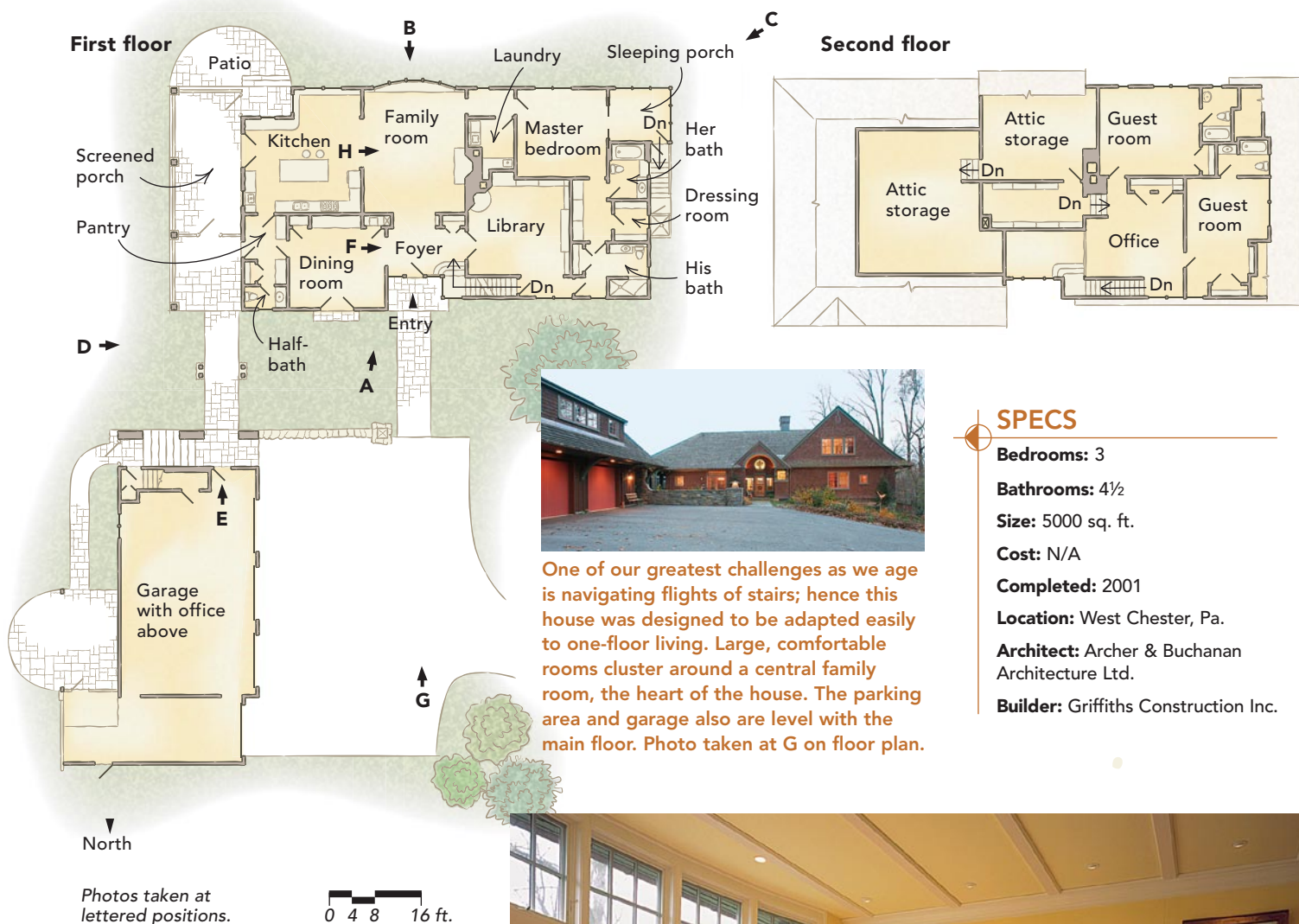
Just as important as the home's aesthetics were the practical needs of an older couple.

They wanted enough room for children and grandchildren within a home that would convert easily to one-floor living when the need arose. The floor plan subtly reflects that, with the master bedroom, baths, kitchen, and dining and family rooms concentrated on one floor (floor plan, facing page).

With the best view, the highest ceiling, and a central connection to the rest of the house, the family room serves as the heart of the home. Its neighborly connection to the much-



THE ESSENTIALS ARE ALL ON ONE FLOOR



SPECS

Bedrooms: 3

Bathrooms: 4½

Size: 5000 sq. ft.

Cost: N/A

Completed: 2001

Location: West Chester, Pa.

Architect: Archer & Buchanan Architecture Ltd.

Builder: Griffiths Construction Inc.

One of our greatest challenges as we age is navigating flights of stairs; hence this house was designed to be adapted easily to one-floor living. Large, comfortable rooms cluster around a central family room, the heart of the house. The parking area and garage also are level with the main floor. Photo taken at G on floor plan.

used kitchen is mutually advantageous. The current floor plan has enough room for social events and for the Scholls' children and grandchildren, who are frequently in and out of the house.

If and when navigating stairs becomes more of an issue, structural changes will not be necessary. In addition, there are no thresholds in the house (even in the showers), a benefit for wheelchair users, seniors, and toddlers.

Another way that we built accessibility into the design was by creating a nearly level plane between the parking area and the first floor. Enter the kitchen through the screened porch, and there are no steps to climb. □

Richard Buchanan, AIA, lives and designs houses in Chester County, Pa. Photos by Terry Scholl, except where noted.



Family room is a variation on a curved theme. The room combines a grid of windows and parallel ceiling moldings with an arched doorway and a sweeping curve at the bow window. More subtle are the curves flanking the fireplace. Photo taken at H on floor plan.