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A SOCIETY HILL TOWNHOUSE DESIGNED BY I.M. PEI IS ON THE CUTTING EDGE ONCE AGAIN, THANKS TO A 21ST-CENTURY UPDATE.

BY KATHLEEN NICHOLSON WEBBER

Buying a home designed by a star architect with the thought of revamping it can be a daunting proposition, especially when the work is by the legendary Pritzker Architecture Prize-winning I.M. Pei, best known for designing the Louvre Pyramid, the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum in Boston, and the Miho Museum in Japan. Deciding to take one of his creations down to the studs and redesign it to fit a modern family of three requires another level of bravado.

This kind of daring was precipitated by the arrival of a baby and a daily trek of 52 stairs to the door of a third-floor condo owned by Kevin Yoder. Yoder, an architect who had worked in high-end hospitality design for BLT Architects and corporate interiors at EwingCole, and opened his own firm in 2010, was living on Third Street at Locust with his partner, Harvey Hurdle, when they were months into parenthood; they knew they needed a family-friendly home. They both loved all of the green spaces in their neighborhood, so the search was limited to Society Hill.

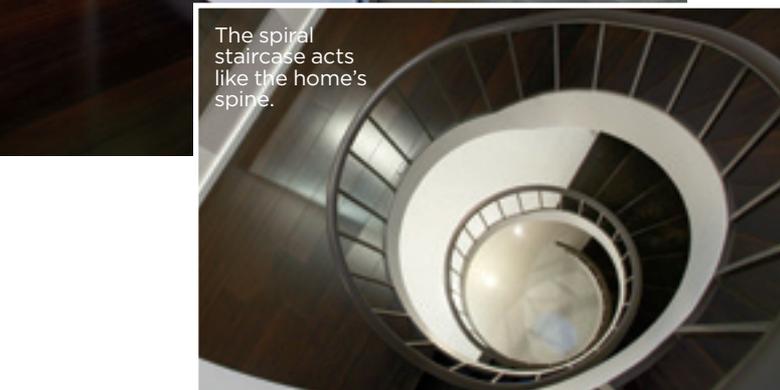
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Kevin Yoder's redesign of an I.M. Pei townhome preserves its signature features.





Wall-mounted vanities in the bathroom make the space feel larger.



The spiral staircase acts like the home's spine.



Medium-hued woods provide a warming effect throughout the house.

“Pei’s designs are pure geometry. This new design reinforces those lines.” —KEVIN YODER

do more, installing recessed lighting and new floors, keeping the bones of the house and the signature Pei features—such as the spiral staircase that acts like the home’s spine, starting from the lower level and extending to the third level—in tact.

In his plans, he decided to reconfigure rooms, take down walls, and use the same palette of materials throughout the home to make it appear more spacious. The end result is an ultra-modern house warmed by his use

of medium-hued woods, as well as color and texture throughout.

In the kitchen he took down walls to create an open first-floor layout; a visitor can now see from the front entrance to the back courtyard garden. “When you are in the dining room, you feel like you are sitting in the garden.”

On the third floor, Yoder moved the master bedroom to the Third Street side and the other two bedrooms to the back of the house. In the master bath, he mounted vanities on the wall to make the space feel larger, and he added a skylight to save on energy and give the rooms a better light quality. “On a moonlit night in the city, there is a nice glow in the bathrooms.”

Yoder, who now works on redesign projects with other Pei homeowners, feels like he honored the prize-winning architect’s work with the final product. “Pei’s designs are pure geometry. Everything is curvilinear and pure forms. The rooms of this new design now reinforce those lines.” 241 S. 3rd St., 267-994-1103; kyoderdesign.com **PS**

PEI IT FORWARD

I.M. Pei’s trademark design features are wowing a new generation of homeowners.

Just who appreciates living in a modern I.M. Pei house like the ones he designed in Society Hill? Jan Stephano, an agent with Plumer & Associates agency, says there are many homeowners who relish Pei’s use of light and open space. Stephano would know: She has lived in a Pei home for more than 40 years. When she points out signature features like the Flemish bond in the brick, buyers are intrigued.

Stephano says the homes go for \$850,000 to about \$1 million or more, and when owners want to renovate, they get creative. “One homeowner blew out the whole third floor, making it one large master-bedroom suite.”

Another draw for the homes is the neighborhood and the landscape. “A lot of people like the fact that the [structures] are not very tall. Because of that, this neighborhood has much more light to it,” Stephano says.

Kevin Yoder’s reinterpretation of Pei’s design is modern, but in an imaginative way. “I love taking people to see Kevin’s house—he did it in a modern way. Many of the houses, like mine, are decorated in a traditional fashion, and that works well, too.”

Plumer & Associates, Inc., 226 South St., 215-922-4200; janstephano.com

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Across the street was a block of I.M. Pei townhomes, built in 1962 during the area’s redevelopment. “In the late ’50s, the area was rundown, with lots of commercial properties and abandoned homes,” says Yoder. The city’s plan was for it to once again become a model residential area.” Led by Edmund Bacon, the City Planning Commission’s director, the city bought 31 acres near Dock Street for a new apartment complex that would become Society Hill Towers and 37 brick-façade townhomes. Chosen for the design over four competitors was the New York firm Webb & Knapp and its noted architect I.M. Pei.

Yoder, whose hospitality work includes Revel resort in Atlantic City and Echelon Place in Las Vegas, bought one of the townhomes and took a year to modernize the 3,200-square-foot space. Originally the idea was to update the kitchen and baths, which had not been touched since the ’60s. Once he started, though, he wanted to