



Designed by the prominent mid-century architecture firm Muhlenberg Brothers in the late 1950s, a house outside Reading, Pennsylvania (left), proved irresistible for Philadelphians Paul Savidge and Dan Macey. The couple worked with architect Kevin Yoder and interior designer Louise Cohen to refurbish the brick-and-wood home, adding a 36-foot salt-water pool (opposite), where their golden-doodle likes to take an afternoon float.

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A Retro Revelation

Experts in renovating historic homes, a Pennsylvania couple transform a surprising find into their forever house.

In December 2017, Paul Savidge and Dan Macey were staying at a hotel for a wedding in Reading, one and a half hours northwest of their home in Philadelphia. Once outside the nuptial festivities, they were met with a bleak winter weekend, and the couple got a flat tire on a dark and icy trip home. The dour weather seeped into their mood. *Who would want to live here?* they asked each other.

As it turned out, they would.

In February 2019, the pair got a call from a real estate agent and friend specializing in mid-century houses. There was a house in Wyomissing, a town next to Reading, that they had to see, she said.

“We drove up to the site, we looked at the house, and we looked at each other,” says Paul. Before the sun set, they were ready to sell their second home in New Hope, a town on the New Jersey border, and buy this one.

Built in 1957, the flat-roofed, International Style house featured floor-to-ceiling steel windows interspersed with oatmeal-hued brick walls and was perched

on a slightly elevated corner parcel of land surrounded by a short slate wall. It was also a single story—exactly what Paul and Dan wanted to settle into as retirement edged closer.

The original owner, Dr. Elmer L. Horst, was, as his daughter later told Paul and Dan, “obsessed” with Philip Johnson and tried to hire the famous architect. When Johnson turned him down, he looked to local architecture firm Muhlenberg Brothers to design the house in that style and retained Johnson’s longtime collaborator, William Pahlmann, to do the interiors. The furniture that Pahlmann designed was long gone by the time Paul and Dan arrived, but they did find one original remnant during renovations: a scrap of wallpaper illustrated with restaurant matchbooks that they framed and mounted in the foyer.

As for the surrounding area, the couple realized it would be the antidote to the isolation of their woodsy New Hope home. In this tree-lined neighborhood, homes were situated more closely, with sidewalks

leading down to a small lake, and neighbors waved to one another on garbage day. Dan, a food stylist and historian, had his pick of options from a “hipster butcher,” large Latino markets, and the local Amish food stands. Of their earlier misapprehension about the area, Paul, the chief legal officer for a biotechnology firm, shakes his head. “We were just stupid—it’s great.”

The pair brought on their own longtime collaborators over multiple homes: architect Kevin Yoder of K Yoder Design and interior designer Louise Cohen. In 2014, Yoder led an 18-month restoration of their Philadelphia home, Louis Kahn’s Esherick House, just listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The couple split their time between Wyomissing, Philadelphia, and Sarasota, Florida, depending on their work and the weather.

The architecture of the Wyomissing home also appealed to their preservationist sensibilities. Dan is on the board of the Chestnut Hill Conservancy, and the couple dug into “boxes and boxes” of Pahlmann archives at the Hagley Museum in >



Wilmington, Delaware. The previous owners passed on the collection of Johnson books they had received from Horst. But this renovation, unlike the Esherick House, wouldn't require approval from a historical commission and offered more room for their personal whimsy.

The two-and-a-half-year project—like all the couple's other extensive renovations, says Cohen with a laugh—was supposed to be small. For starters, the ovens in the kitchen couldn't fit a Thanksgiving turkey, which wouldn't do for Dan. To accommodate a new kitchen layout, the original walnut cabinetry had to be replaced, and they went with local firm Lutz Wood. Cohen also swapped out the dark brown kitchen island countertop for a four-inch-thick white quartz one with a heavy 14-inch overhang. It required a steel cable running through the slab so that it wouldn't tip over.

In the midst of the renovation, Paul, a board member of the National Jane Austen Society, realized that there was no space for his large book collection. So Yoder

conceived an extension for a sunken library in what used to be a courtyard and added a backbar in the former laundry room across from it. "Even the design of the windows that were added to the library is sensitive to the style of the times," says Paul. The team used more custom walnut millwork along with bricks from nearby manufacturer Glen-Gery, which has been in operation since 1890 and supplied the original house. "You would look at the room and say, Oh, that was there in 1957," says Dan of the addition.

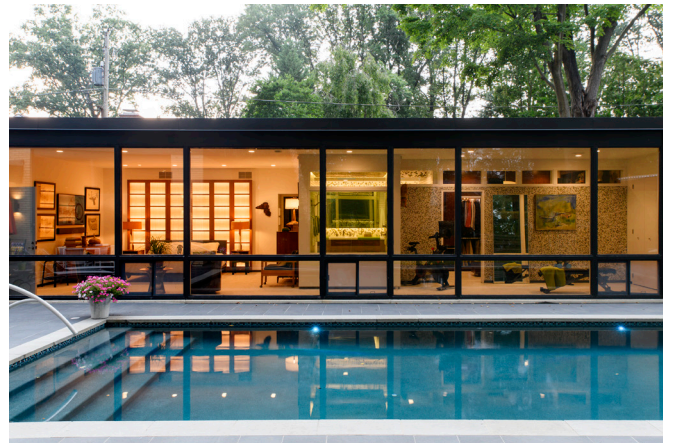
To pay homage to the house's vintage, the couple made other tweaks. After considering terrazzo and brick—both Johnson-style flooring but too expensive—they replaced the wall-to-wall carpeting with herringbone slate tiles. The bathrooms were previously outfitted with inoffensive white tiles; Paul and Dan kept the porcelain sinks but added retro color via a pink-and-blue tiled guest bathroom with a cobalt blue Corian countertop and a flooring mosaic of white and greens.

The two avid collectors' art fills the

house. "Paul had bought these vintage A.V. Mazzega blown-glass lights probably twenty years ago at auction, and they have been literally carting them around from residence to residence, trying to put them in every project," recounts Cohen. They finally found a home above the bar.

The one-time skeptics have become local boosters in their aesthetics too. Next to their newly installed saltwater pool is a 1950s-esque mural of swimmers by British-born artist Robert Pepper, who lives in the area. And Paul and Dan feature pagodas—a symbol of Reading—as a motif throughout their home: the salt and pepper shakers; on hand towels in the entryway bathroom; as a tall, teal sculpture in front of similarly patterned gold-and-gray wallpaper by Phillip Jeffries in the dining room.

"I always say to Dan, 'We'll probably die in the hospital here in Reading,'" says Paul as the summer sun reflects on the pool and their two dogs laze about on the patio. Sometimes life comes together in the place you least expect. ■



A former laundry room was turned into a bar with walnut millwork by Lutz Wood. The vintage lights are by A.V. Mazzega, and the custom-upholstered Tulip stools are from Knoll. The bar faces a sunken library (right) that houses Paul's extensive Jane Austen

collection. Built-in walnut seating, also by Lutz Wood, is covered in Cortina Leathers cushions. A 1960s Hungarian tapestry hangs nearby. At night, light coming through the wall of original steel-framed windows illuminates the pool area (above right).

