

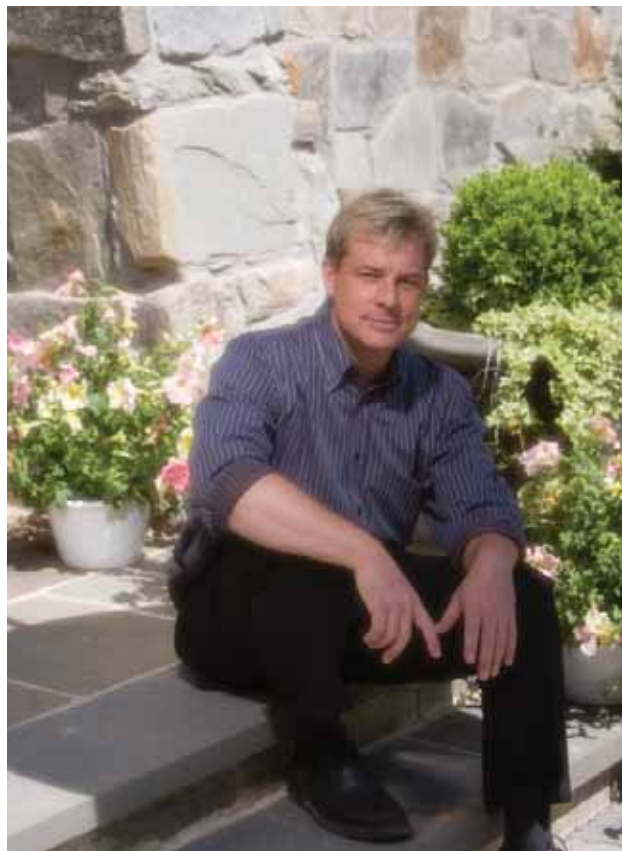
A Living Laboratory

A loyal devotee of the Arts and Crafts movement, designer Rob Morris takes the historical style one step further in the creation of his new Virginia residence

By Barbara Karth
Photography by Lydia Cutter

For Rob Morris, his new McLean home is a laboratory for his design and construction firm, Morris-Day, Inc. This latest residence—his sixth in ten years—displays an increased complexity in its interpretation of the Arts and Crafts movement and the Craftsman home rooted in the years around the turn of the 20th century. More than a homage to the past, his home looks to the future. Morris distinctively designed it to function for the way he lives and entertains. And yet, he built in flexibility for future owners as he will inevitably come to build another.

After renovating and building dozens of historically inspired homes distinguished by a refined eye for detail and craftsmanship, Morris has developed a reputation for reviving architectural styles in an honest and authentic way. His largest home to this point, the new “cottage” as he calls it,



Rob Morris (above) designed his new home in McLean with its fortress-like stone façade (opposite, top) in a nod to the Gothic style of 19th-century English country homes. In the back of the property, he frequently hosts parties around the back porch and flagstone pool (opposite, bottom).

always like the spiritual overtones in houses, the notion of a cave-like entrance in a big stone wall, the archway and these

Architecture: Rob Morris, Morris-Day, Inc., Arlington, Virginia

Interior Design: Morris DiNapoli, McLean, Virginia
Construction: Morris-Day, Inc., Arlington, Virginia

evokes country houses of England built in the last quarter of the 19th century when elements of earlier Tudor and Gothic styles infiltrated homes of the Arts and Crafts period. As he references the past, he maintains the modes of the period: natural materials, stone and wood, fine craftsmanship and an organic foundation that is stylized and simplified to avoid overly ambitious ornamentation.

From the end of the drive, the stone façade of Morris's home appears fortress-like. “I





A compressed vestibule in the entryway opens to a staircase (above) and a soaring hall with an 18-foot coffered ceiling (opposite). On the mantel, Morris incorporated the carved wooden griffins he acquired years ago and saved for just the perfect occasion.

buttresses on both sides. It looks like an enormous ancient wall with a tiny hole cut through—no detail whatsoever. It is a hard exterior,” he explains.

At the front door, detailing and refinements, brackets, panels and leaded glass announce what is to come.

Inside, the vestibule is compressed, opening into the “hall.” In this case, “hall” has two meanings. First, it is where all the rooms converge. “I did not want to have the separate articulation of a specific, separate foyer as much as I wanted this room to feel like the old English hall. They always had a staircase...and a fireplace,” Morris explains. He positioned a massive fireplace opposite the staircase.

To the right, the ceiling soars to 18 feet in height. Despite the difference in ceiling height, the concept of one space becomes apparent as a balcony above the entry opens into this great hall—the second definition of the word. Three

balconies project prominently into the room, giving presence to the tall space. Morris frequently entertains, for political fundraisers, charity events and just for fun. When a politician speaks on pressing issues from Morris’s balcony everyone has a good view. During his parties, a band plays as furniture below is pushed against the walls and guests dance into the morning.

Morris acquired a pair of carved-wood griffins years ago and stored them away for a time when he would find the perfect place to use them. Now they support the mantel. Two tones of stain recall inlays of wood on the massive fireplace opposite the staircase.

Equally momentous, the woodwork surrounding the doorways was designed in proportion and scale to the room. Brackets support a domineering entablature, simplified as befits the Craftsman style yet nodding to the grand



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entrances of the past, notes Morris. Paneling over the doorway is reminiscent of a transom. "By recalling it you complete it in your mind," he adds.

Ironwork and lighting fixtures, many retrieved from centuries-old manor houses, recall a Gothic-influenced style of the Craftsman era. Ceilings are prominent in Morris designs; in this hall they are coffered.

On close examination, the papered walls reveal gold tigers on a gray backdrop, yet from a distance, they read as texture. "There is something really fascinating about these ambiguous colors," says Morris. "We select colors with an eye toward red, yellow, specific golds, but those colors that are ultimately most fascinating are those without an identity. They acquire their identity by the neighboring color and they change in different light." The walls often appear to be moss green. To Morris, they recall the plaster of an old building, one with the dignity and grace that comes with age.

Travertine tile floors make the hall an ideal party room, impervious to spills with a hard surface for dancing. Wide plank oak floors circulate through the remainder of the house. They achieve a rustic yet refined look with oil and hand-rubbing, no sheen. "The finish is not even, which allows the grain of the wood to give texture to the floor," the owner/designer explains.

When Morris entertains large crowds, a few guests will gravitate into the nearby "winter room" for conversation and a bit of quiet relaxation by the fireplace. Both a public and a private space, this cozy room, a Morris must-have, doubles as his home office. Built-in bookshelves are stained to give the appearance of furniture.

The family room is the everyday hub of the house where the kitchen, living and casual dining areas converge. Morris, an accomplished cook who frequently prepares dinner for anywhere from two to 20 guests, has created a kitchen that combines the best of residential kitchen design with the convenience accorded professional chefs in a

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restaurant. Frequently used items are stored on open shelves surrounding the range.

As in so many of Morris's own homes, there is a casual seating area/family room next to the food preparation area, with the casual dining area to the side. Since everyone gathers around to chat with the chef, he reasons, they may as well have a comfortable place to sit.

The master bedroom is also on the main floor. It opens onto a porch for easy access to the pool. The master bath is built on two levels. A couple of steps down from the vanity area and generously sized toilet room is a spa-like bathing area with a sunken tub and open shower. Plants thrive in the moist atmosphere of the bathing area and the expanse of windows on three sides.

On this main level there is also a spacious dining room with soaring windows, French doors and a deeply vaulted ceiling plus a butler's pantry—a Morris essential for all his entertaining. Also, he added a guest room for older visitors who would find stairs troublesome.

For surprising fun, guests visit the powder room where the walls are painted with black chalkboard paint. A narrow ledge holds pieces of colored chalk for writing messages, everything from bits of humor and original poems to a significant birthday they want Rob to remember—one written by an aging friend. Lines are known to form during Morris's larger parties as guests linger in the powder room to read—and write—personal missives to their host.

Upstairs there are four guest bedrooms off a hallway decorated with multitudes of family photos in black frames. Two bedrooms are decorated for specific people: a blue and white one for his parents and a pale pink and green room brimming with bouquets of roses on the wallpaper and fabrics. This room is for his nieces, who, he says, “have always felt alienated because I didn't have girly rooms for them. So

In Morris's cozy “winter room,” which doubles as his home office, he created a slight radius to the fireplace “to reach out into the room a little bit more.” Marble tiles add texture to the fireplace surround while built-in bookshelves are stained to resemble furniture.



The casual seating area near the kitchen accommodates guests while Morris whips up dinner for anywhere between two and 20 guests (above). Chalkboard paint on the walls allows guests to leave messages in the powder room (below).

I decided, let's just do girly flowers, soft colors and now they have a room."

For Morris, his house is about design, exploring new concepts, refining building techniques and details. In this home, Morris expands his laboratory as he embarks on a new business partnership with designer Rose DiNapoli, integrating interior design into their clients' projects. A cottage on the property is being outfitted to house the new venture, called Morris DiNapoli. Morris and DiNapoli aim to blend basic architectural tenets of the past into their clients' homes, not creating replications, but interpreting quality workmanship, proportion and scale while instilling individuality for today. As the two work together, "they strive for the same 'memory' and clarity of space," notes Morris.

Yet, ultimately the home Rob Morris loves to share is about family, friends ... and fun. ❖

Contributing editor Barbara Karth resides in Chevy Chase, Maryland. Photographer Lydia Cutter is based in Arlington, Virginia.



In the kitchen, a stainless-steel countertop and backsplash provide a modern counterpoint to the traditional, furniture-style millwork and cabinetry. Morris defines the workspace with Farrow & Ball wallpaper on the ceiling.

RESOURCES

EXTERIOR

Landscape Design: Garden Wise, Inc., Arlington, VA.
Landscape Installation: Rick Moreland, Annapolis, MD.

FOYER

Lighting: Dominion Electric, Arlington, VA.

THE HALL

Sofa: J. Lambeth, Washington, DC.
Chairs & Ottoman: Vanguard, Pugrant Associates, Washington, DC.
Chair Fabric: Voyage "Adelphi."
Wallpaper: "Dionysus" by Beaumont & Fletcher, Washington, DC.
Flooring: Travertine.
Rug: Morris DiNapoli.
Second-Level Paintings: *Grandparents*, by Stephanie George.
Painting over Fireplace: Antique, Personal Collection.
Sconces & Chandelier: Antique, Morris DiNapoli.

STUDY

English Reproduction Desk, Rugs, Antique Sconces, Antique Chandelier & Accessories: Morris DiNapoli.
Wing Chair: Stanford.
Drapery/Ottoman/Desk Chair Fabric: Morris & Co. "Rose," via J. Lambeth, Washington, DC.
Fireplace Surround: Marble "Ochre" by Marble Systems, Fairfax, VA.
Desk Light: Restoration Hardware.
Paint: Duron "Tobacco Road."

FAMILY ROOM

Chairs: Vanguard, through Pugrant Associates, Washington, DC.
Chair Fabric: Voyage "Belle Epoque."
Rug: Morris DiNapoli.
Tables: Fauld Furniture.



The wall screening the vanity area from the rest of the master bathroom doubles as a soothing waterfall (above). An open shower and a sunken tub swathed in plants create a year-round greenhouse effect in Morris's personal retreat (right).

KITCHEN

Cabinets: Shaker Style by Hagerstown Kitchens, Inc., Hagerstown, MD.
 Cabinet Paint: Duron "Subtly Natural."
 Island Counter: "Mint Green" Honed Granite.
 Appliances: Stainless Sub-Zero Refrigerator & Freezer & Wolf Stove,
 Appliance Distributors Unlimited, Inc.
 Pendants: Morris DiNapoli.
 Ceiling Wallpaper: Farrow & Ball, Washington, DC.

MASTER BATHROOM

Floor Tile: Three-color Hexagonal Mosaic in Silver, Sage, Porcelain and
 Ebony by Dal-Tile Corporation.
 Wall tile: Three-by-six-inch Carrera Marble.
 "Tea for Two" Tub & Plumbing Fixtures: Kohler.
 Walls: Duron "Tram Gray."

