

OUTSIDE



Lush gardens landscaped by Michael Van Valkenburgh surround the pool house of a suburban St. Louis residence conceived by architect Peter Rose with interiors by designer Heather Wells. A Katherine Bradford painting overlooks modular Usona sofas paired with a rounded chair and poufs by Paola Lenti, which also designed the chairs on the terrace. For details see Sources.

THE LINES



Grounded in tradition and leavened with lively contemporary art, a St. Louis family home is anything but conventional—not least its path to completion

*By Vicky Lowry
Photography by Joshua McHugh*



SEVERAL YEARS AGO, A ST. LOUIS COUPLE WITH TWO YOUNG DAUGHTERS AND A GROWING ART COLLECTION

recruited a dream team to build their dream house. Like many highly imaginative plans, this one took some challenging turns—a devastating one, actually—before the vision was ultimately realized. First to come on board the project was celebrated landscape architect Michael Van Valkenburgh, who is based in New York and Cambridge, Massachusetts. The couple had met him when he won a competition to revamp the park surrounding St. Louis's Gateway Arch, the iconic riverfront monument designed by Eero Saarinen. He was joined by a longtime collaborator, Peter Rose, the Boston architect and prominent Harvard University educator whose firm has handled everything from museums and symphony spaces to cutting-edge coastal retreats. The couple discovered their interior designer, Heather Wells, in a magazine, admiring her work on a townhouse that sensitively melded inviting furnishings with contemporary art.

The wife, who is American, has always favored the kind of traditional homes she grew up in. Her British husband, however, is a flat-out modernist with adventurous tastes in art. "I think they hired us," Rose says, "because we talked about the connection, or disconnection, between these two impulses, the modernist and the historicist. They thought we might be able to manage that kind of complexity."

What emerged was a sophisticated, 18,000-square-foot, six-bedroom house sheathed in handmade Danish brick and topped with classical slate roofs. The more progressive interiors feature sculptural staircases, an intriguing variety of ceiling heights, ample white walls finished in

One side of the soaring entrance hall features a large Sarah Sze painting, and a work by Glenn Ligon hangs on an adjacent wall. OPPOSITE: In the lower-level lounge, Wells grouped a mustard-hued Pierre Paulin sofa and an India Mahdavi cocktail table, both from Ralph Pucci, with a Christophe Delcourt sectional sofa and a Vladimir Kagan lounge chair and ottoman; a Henni Alftan painting hangs between a Serge Mouille two-arm sconce and a Usona table lamp.



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In the family room, a sectional sofa, a Marcel Wolterinck barrel-back chair, and a Christophe Delcourt stool are arrayed around a Martha Sturdy table with a Carl Hansen three-legged chair and an armchair and ottoman by Minotti; the painting is by Rosalyn Drexler. OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: A Carol Bove sculpture stands beneath a staircase. The concrete façades of the pool house buildings are inset with expanses of Vermont Verde Antique stone from Marmi. Wells installed a Drift light sculpture in a living room sitting area furnished with a pair of chairs by Vladimir Kagan (next to the window) and another set by Jaime Hayon around a Caste cocktail table; the painting on the left wall is by N. Dash, and the rug is by Hechizoo.



Japanese *shikkui* plaster, and steel-framed glass walls that provide sweeping views of the surrounding five-acre property, which Van Valkenburgh manipulated to create a landscape of small, undulating hills. “There are rooms that may look quite ordinary,” Rose explains, “but when you’re in them the space is almost infinite because it extends out into these extraordinary external spaces.”

A month before completion, however, a fire broke out in the house and burned over the course of a day. That evening, the couple sipped stiff drinks on their lawn and, as the husband recalls, “watched the end of what we thought was a dream.”

Fortunately, none of the furnishings or artworks had been installed. Also spared was the breathtaking pool house compound, an indoor-outdoor haven comprising concrete walls inset with richly veined Vermont Verde Antique stone, green roofs planted with feathery prairie grasses, and expansive terraces shaded by an Alaskan cedar brise-soleil with banana-shaped fins.

After everyone sufficiently recovered their equilibrium, the family decided to move into the pool house while the team rebuilt the main house on the same footprint, an effort that required two more years.

If anything, the extra time allowed the team to refine and elevate their vision. Rose made a few tweaks to the interior spaces, while Wells focused on perfecting the decor. In the final scheme, she deployed spectacular light fixtures by Mathieu Lehanneur, Niamh Barry, Lindsey Adelman, and Drift to help animate the rooms, while emphasizing sculptural, often colorful furniture, such as the lower-level lounge’s mustard-yellow Pierre Paulin sofa, the living room’s Vladimir Kagan Wysiwyg chairs, and the Paola Lenti armchairs and poufs in the pool house. Fabrics are textured and sumptuous. “Everything is really soft to the touch,” Wells says. “I love a house that looks like you can sit anywhere even if there’s a formality to it.”





Working with art adviser Abigail Goodman from Goodman Taft, the couple continued to bolster their collection. The result is a compelling mix of works that is thoughtful yet uninhibited and totally of the moment in its showcasing of women and artists of color. The soaring entry is hung with paintings by Glenn Ligon, Pat Steir, and Sarah Sze. A freewheeling abstract painting by Charline von Heyl adds an exhilarating note to the library, while a Lynda Benglis wall sculpture presides over the dining room's sprawling Rick Owens table, along with large-scale paintings by Jack Whitten, Tauba Auerbach, and Erin Shirreff. A work by Katherine Bradford brings colorful verve to the pool house, adding to its fun weekend retreat vibe.

In explaining the couple's art choices, the husband notes that he lives in a house full of women and was raised by a single mother. "Feminism is definitely part of our collection," he says. "And we have also given deep thought to Black artists and emerging artists. We want to bring up our daughters so that they really understand our histories. We want to ensure that they walk into their future with a good understanding of all those artists who have significantly brought about change." He adds that St. Louis is a microcosm of America today, "wrestling with its future," as he puts it. "All of that is reflected in how we collect art." □

A Niamh Barry light fixture swirls above the dining room's Rick Owens table and Jacques Guillon chairs; a Sarah Lucas sculpture perches next to a Tauba Auerbach painting on the far wall, and an Erin Shirreff work hangs to the right. ABOVE: Wells installed a Gubi chair next to a custom sofa around the library's Holly Hunt cocktail table; the sculpture in front of the window is by Arlene Shechet. OPPOSITE: The exterior of the house is clad in handmade bricks by Petersen Tegl.









Paola Lenti chaise longues
and Martha Sturdy side tables
line the poolside terrace
shaded by a brise-soleil with
elegantly curved fins.



Beneath the kitchen's Mathieu Lehanneur light fixture, stools by Phase Design tuck under a Corian island outfitted with a Dornbracht faucet; the dining table and chairs are by B&B Italia, and the artwork on the far wall is by Marley Freeman. BELOW: The home's rear façade. OPPOSITE: In the primary bedroom, walnut paneling clads the wall behind the A. Rudin custom-made bed dressed with a Roman and Williams Guild throw, while Jeremy Maxwell Wintrebert pendants are suspended on either side; the mirrored artwork is by Nick Mauss, the chair is by Holly Hunt, and the side table is by Jaime Hayon.



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1 To source art for the home, designer Heather Wells enlisted advisory firm **Goodman Taft**, which helped acquire this 2020 neon canvas by **Charline von Heyl**, a German artist who has been creating dazzling and enigmatic abstract paintings for the past three decades. With studios in New York and Marfa, Texas, she presented a large solo survey, "Snake Eyes," at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, D.C., in 2019. "It feels like graffiti in a way," says Wells. "We wanted something brightly colored and supermodern to offset the dark, cavelike quality of the library." petzel.com

2 A stirring work by Paris-based artist **Henni Alftan** hangs in the lower-level lounge and was originally displayed at the

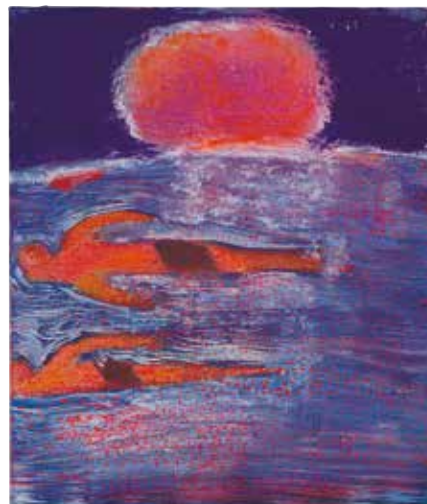
up-and-coming talent's first solo show in the U.S., at Karma in 2020. "I love the austerity and simplicity of her work," says Wells. Shown here is a 2019 painting, *English Garden*, which puts a modern spin on the traditional landscape. karmakarma.org

3 "There's an ethereal quality and a humor to her practice," explains Wells of **Katherine Bradford**, the celebrated Brooklyn painter whose color-soaked swimming scenes were on view last summer at Milan gallery Kaufmann Repetto. Fittingly, one of her luminous canvases hangs in the pool house. "That piece adds this beautiful pop of color," she says. Just like this 2015 canvas, *Couples Swim*. canadanewyork.com

4 The third-floor lounge has a mood that Wells describes as "vintage and sort of



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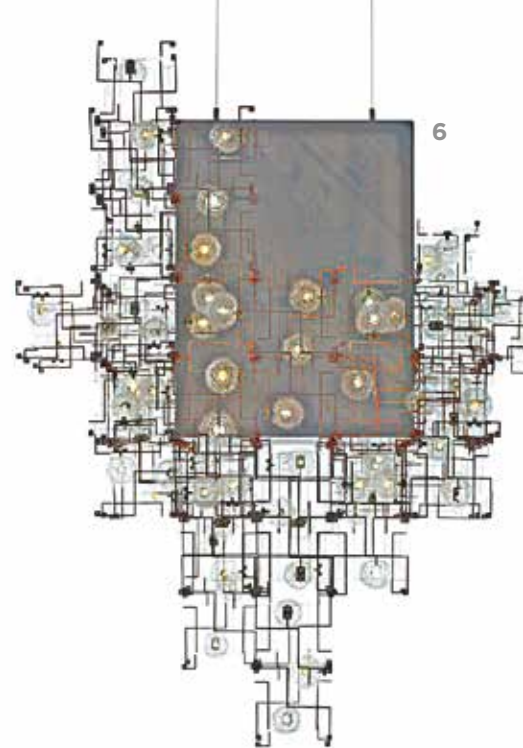


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Scandinavian,” with floor-to-ceiling windows lending a “SoHo feel.” The furnishings include a credenza from **BDDW**, a custom sectional by **Fern**, and a **B&B Italia** cocktail table. bddw.com, fernny.com, bebitalia.com

5 Sheathed in Vermont Verde Antique stone, the pool court evokes architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe’s famed Barcelona Pavilion. “It feels like you’re retreating,” says Wells. An Alaskan cedar brise-soleil shades a row of chic sun beds by **Paola Lenti**. paolalenti.it

6 “It brings a moment of delicacy,” remarks Wells of the lounge’s **Drift** light sculpture, which contains real dandelion seeds adhered one by one to each tiny LED bulb. “It’s dramatic but not heavy.” carpentersworkshopgallery.com

7 Animating the entry hall is a poetic **Pat Steir** painting, *Red for Hong Kong*, which comes from a series that Lévy Gorvy debuted at Art Basel Hong Kong in 2018. “It’s like having an exclamation point right off the bat,” says Wells. levygorvy.com

8 A sculpture by New York artist **Arlene Shechet** graces a corner of the library, appearing almost like an exotic fossil. “We love the crafted texture of it,” says Wells. This 2020 piece, made of brightly glazed ceramic and painted steel, was created during the first pandemic quarantine as a beacon of spiritual nourishment and was displayed at Pace Gallery’s East Hampton location that summer. pacegallery.com



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