

AT HOME

THE BOSTON GLOBE • THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 1998

F
 TV and Radio F6-7



A historic home is rendered anew with minimalist modern details that perfectly suit its poet owners

Viewed from the sidewalk, the 1840 house hasn't been altered much, save for the removal of vinyl siding and an application of paint.

The interior was reconceived with simple, yet dramatic, flair. "Books needed to live here," said the owners, who are poets. "We wanted a library — this house was going to be filled with books."

Architects David Stern and Diane McCafferty transformed the formerly dark, narrow front hall, where the old staircase was replaced by a modern one as taut as the rigging of a ship.



PHOTOS/STEVEN GERARD

Architecture

Poetic justice

By Robert Campbell
 GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

If you're a deep-sea diver, you do not live in Switzerland. That's the reason, they say, they moved from Colorado to Boston. They're two poets. For them, the Boston area is the deep sea of poetry, a place to immerse yourself in verse. So Kurt Brown and Laure-Anne Bosselaar have just renovated a house in Cambridge. They've done it with the kind of extreme care I guess you'd expect from poets.

It's a historic 1840 house on a quiet, almost hidden street. From the sidewalk, it hasn't changed much. Governed by the rules of the Cambridge Historical Commission, the new owners merely stripped the vinyl siding and applied a fresh coat of paint.

But inside, as the poet Yeats once wrote, all's changed, changed utterly. Every visible surface is new. Working with two young architects, David Stern and Diane McCafferty, Kurt and Laure-Anne created, in this old house, the kind of

POETS, Page F8

Like poetry, historic home flows with style

POETS
 Continued from Page F1

minimalist modern interior that depends on perfection of detail.

For contrast, Brown and Bosselaar then planted a lush garden, as a foil for the understated interior. One imagines Laure-Anne gestating poems out there, perhaps at dusk — "The Hour Between Dog and Wolf," the title of her latest book, a Belgian expression for the time of day when you can see an animal coming toward you but can't tell whether it's a dog or a wolf.

Laure-Anne grew up in Belgium, where she spent her teen years in a nunnery (a pretty weird place, judging from her intense poems about it), then became an actress in plays by Brecht and Pirandello, later hosted talk shows on radio and TV. She came to the United States in 1987. Her three kids from an earlier marriage were grown, and "I wanted to be fluent in American, I wanted to write American." She met Kurt Brown at the Aspen Writers Conference, of which he was then director.

Both are as interested in promoting poetry as in writing it. Kurt edits and publishes theme anthologies — for instance, "Drive, They Said: Poems About Americans and Their Cars" and "Night Out: Poems About Hotels, Motels, Restaurants and Bars." They also organize public

readings. "We are more ambitious for poetry than for our own work," says Laure-Anne.

They bought the house the instant they saw it (it had been the home of Philip Areeda, a noted professor at Harvard Law School). Poetry then led them to their architect: David Stern is the son of poet Gerald Stern, a friend of Brown's. Stern asked Diane McCafferty to partner with him on the job. They'd met when both worked for Boston architects Schwartz Silver.

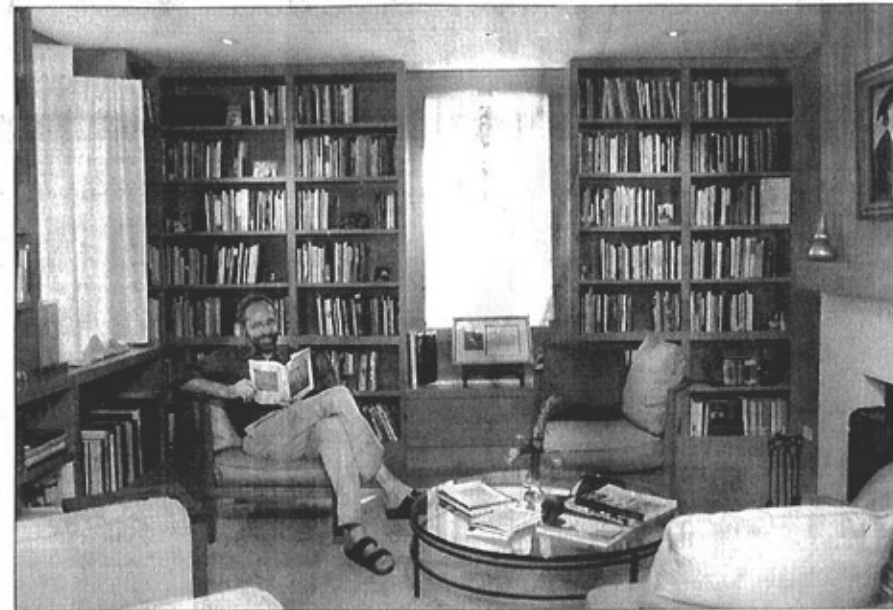
Two bedrooms became his-and-hers writing rooms. A closet between them was removed 'so the rooms could talk to each other.'

"We told David and Diane we wanted it extremely simple," say the owners. "Books needed to live here, and poets. We wanted a library — this house was going to be filled with books. We wanted it soulful. We wanted a writing room for each of us. We wanted a bathroom with windows. We wanted wide board floors."

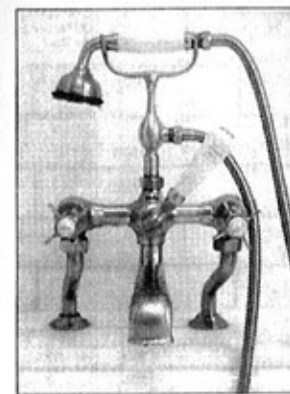
Stern and McCafferty transformed a dark house of cramped rooms into a spacious, open dwelling filled with light and transparency. You see the difference the moment you enter, in the formerly dark, narrow front hall, where the old stair was replaced by a modern one as taut and minimal as the rigging of a ship. New skylights flood the hall with light on both floors, showing off Laure-Anne's collection of Flemish and Dutch paintings and, on the second floor, framed poems.

The old front parlor became the library. It is lined with bookcases veneered in pale pear wood. Its focus is a fireplace of white polished Portuguese limestone with a black soapstone hearth — part of a color scheme that extends throughout the house, which Laure-Anne calls "bitter ale blond with black steel and stone." (All the fireplaces were rebuilt from the basement to the roof.) The wide board floors are here, too, made of 12-inch-wide organ pine (a species of Western Douglas fir), quarter-sawn for clear grain without knots. Like a poet obsessed with getting every word right, Laure-Anne insisted on deciding which board would go next to which, to the amusement and exasperation of the builders.

Upstairs, two former bedrooms became his-and-hers writing rooms. A closet between them was removed "so the rooms could talk to each other." A new bathroom — yes, with windows — features glass partitions around the shower. There are brushed-nickel fixtures by an English firm with the wonderful name



Left: Kurt Brown enjoys a book in the library, formerly the front parlor of the renovated 1840 house. Above: Framed poems line the sunlit second-floor wall in the stairway.



The new bathroom (left) features glass partitions around the shower. Brushed-nickel fixtures in the bathtub (above) are an elegant touch.

Czech and Speake, whose London showroom the owners visited. The ambience of the bathroom strongly recalls the work of Eileen Gray, a 1930s French designer who created houses with a taut, airy, high-tech, often nautical character.

Fine furnishings

Most of the modern furniture throughout the house was designed by Diane McCafferty and custom manufactured (largely by Masterpiece in Avon). Exquisite in detail, it is made of pear wood, mahogany, and inlaid ebony, glass and black steel. Among other pieces are a buffet in the dining room, and, above it, shelves lit by invisible fiberoptic cables, which give a mysterious interior glow to a collection of Galle vases, Emile Galle being a turn-of-the-century designer who created sinuous objects of colored glass, sometimes engraved with quotations from poets like Verlaine and Baudelaire.

McCafferty also designed side tables, built-in cabinets, a kitchen table and chairs. She encased the bed in the master bedroom in pear wood. Under that elegant veneer, the bed is really two side-by-side "Craftmatic" beds, the kind advertised on TV, with motorized backs that tilt up at the push of a button.

Besides McCafferty's furniture, there are classic modernist pieces such as the glass-topped dining room table, a design by the celebrated architect LeCorbusier and his collaborator Charlotte Perriand. Around the table are round-backed mahogany chairs by Danish modernist Hans Wegner.

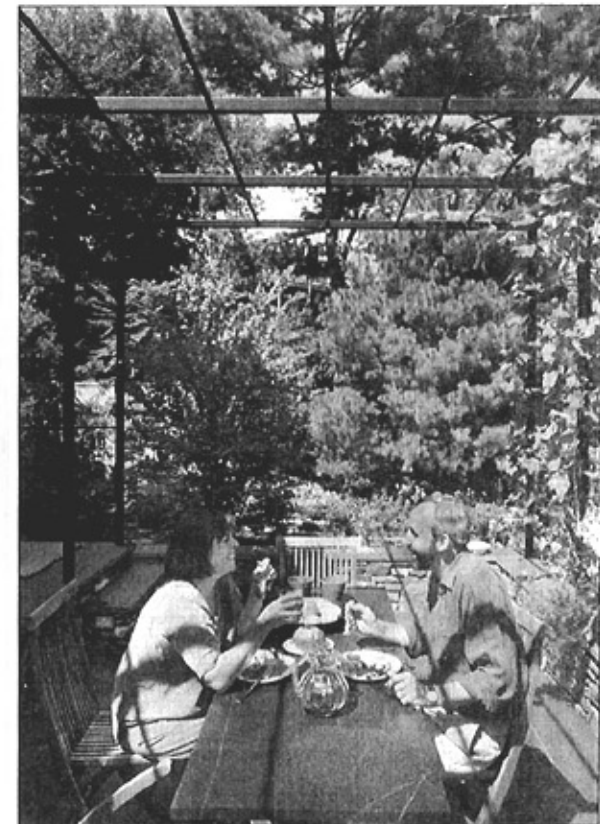
Designing the house was a process that never stopped; it continued even after construction had begun. The owners, the architects, and the contractors — a small firm called Moser & Stanley in Dedham — tried out ideas as they went along. Laure-Anne cut pictures she liked from de-

master bedroom above it, were doubled in width. And a new downstairs half-bath was tucked in, thanks to the courtesy of a neighbor who let it push out across his property line.

The rear garden is as elegant as the house. It was created with the advice of Laura McGrath, a Cambridge landscape architect. A black steel trellis frames a new deck that opens off the kitchen. Grape vines with edible grapes climb the trellis. From the previous ownership, one tall blue spruce, one fir, and one transplanted rhododendron were preserved. Pines, locusts, larch, river birch, corkscrew willow, arbor vitae, and roses are among the many new plants. There are no annuals, and no grass: everything feels serene and permanent, like a Japanese garden, a feeling that's enhanced by the presence of big rocks.

Eventually, the owners hope to add one final touch.

In front of the house, at the sidewalk, there will be a tree-shaded "Poet's Bench," carved out of granite. Here passers-by will be able to sit for a moment of contemplation. The bench will be engraved with a quotation from the French poet Paul Verlaine — "Voici des fruits, des fleurs, des feuilles et des branches": "Here are fruit, flowers, leaves and branches."



Laure-Anne Bosselaar and Brown added a new deck off the kitchen framed by a black steel trellis with climbing grape vine.

Arthur's World
 A FESTIVAL OF FOOD, FAMILIES & FUN
 SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 1998
 THE CHILDREN'S MUSEUM, BOSTON

Join in food and family fun to benefit The Children's Museum of Boston and the Anthony Spinazzola Foundation as 40 of Boston area chefs and their families prepare their favorite healthy and kid friendly recipes just for you. The day will include hands-on activities, interactive demonstrations and friendly competitions, plus a chance to explore "Arthur's" World, the exhibit based on the book and PBS series.

The Children's Museum
 THE ANTHONY SPINAZZOLA FOUNDATION
MAGIC 106.7
 WJZZ Continuous Soft Rock
The Boston Globe
 WCVB TV