



Georgian on His Mind

BUILDING A BEDFORD CLASSIC FOR THE AGES

WE WERE LIVING IN BEDFORD VILLAGE in a wonderful, old house we loved," explains John Walker, a classical architecture enthusiast and lifelong student of all things Jeffersonian. "I had always wanted to build a house and had been storing up ideas for a long time." After years of searching for buildable land within the Village, Walker and his wife, Caroline, expanded their radius and, in due time, received a call from their real estate agent, Frank Haymson, about an eight-acre property adjacent to St. Matthews Episcopal Church. "St. Matthew's is an important part of our lives, and the land was breathtaking, so we were thrilled when our bid was accepted," the retired corporate attorney continues. "We couldn't wait to get started."

Having completed several renovations during the 21 years they lived in their Village Colonial, the Walkers had been impressed by a recent addition to the Fellowship Hall at St. Matthews. Designed by Ralph R. Mackin Architects and built by DPD Builders, the final product spoke volumes about the team's attention to detail. "Ralph has an amazing eye and understood that we wanted to be intimately involved in our design. When we hired him, he assigned Darren Mercer as the project architect, and it was a brilliant match. Darren





was a master; he took our ideas and brought them to life," John adds.

Before the building began, the Walkers hired Dan Divitto of DPD Builders as a consultant and later retained him as the contractor. "Working with the design team from the beginning allowed me to educate them along the way about where money could be best spent for long-term results," recalls Divitto, who has worked in the local construction industry for more than 30 years.

With all the players in place, the design phase could begin. Walker's dream home was to be Georgian in style. Inspired by the works of Andrea Palladio, Thomas Jefferson, and Mott Schmidt, he had compiled a list of rooms and adjacencies and filled a leather portfolio with photos and drawings of windows and architectural details. "I wanted to build a beautiful, classic home of Bedford, along the lines of Mott Schmidt's home on Guard Hill, that would add to the historic character of our town."

A 19th-century barn stood guard at the entrance to the Walker's new property. Reportedly, an old butcher's shop, the structure was salvaged and repaired, and a mid-century main house was torn down to make way for the Georgian.

Walking the land, Mercer, Divitto, and the Walkers realized that slightly adjusting the original home's orientation would maximize views and sunlight. While the long and narrow shape of the house was dictated by the pedestal-type building site, the southern light and northern views were carefully-planned benefits. As DPD Builders began the process of framing the home, John stayed in close contact. "We had such a wonderful working relationship with Dan, that we soon proposed that the garage apartment be finished first, so Caroline and I could move in while the rest of the house was completed,"



HOLIDAY CHEER The Walkers are thrilled with the end result of their collaboration with DPD Builders. To kick off the holidays, they hosted a luncheon to celebrate the season. Caroline prepared arugula and watermelon salad, rack of lamb persillade, popovers, tomatoes Provençal, and Eton Mess (a traditional English dessert of meringue, raspberries, and whipped cream) under the supervision of Winston, the family's Brittany spaniel.



John says. "It was a dream come true to live onsite and watch it day by day. Our team meetings were the highlight of each week."

Completed in 2008, the home is a reflection of John's passion for beautiful architecture and Caroline's eye for color and warmth. The exterior is an elegant blend of stone and clapboard. Leaving nothing to chance, the couple photographed dozens of stone houses and made a chart for Divitto's masons to prioritize color, shape and pattern options. "There are so many variables that go into a stone facade," explains Caroline, a retired attorney and amateur painter who spearheaded the interior decor and collaborated with her husband on the masonry design. "We worked with the stone mason until it was absolutely perfect."

More than satisfied with the fruit of the entire team's labors, the Walkers are full of enthusiasm. Inside the double mahogany doors, the foyer unfolds with gracious symmetry. A bespoke dome caps the three-story entry at the top of the magnificent, winding staircase. Its installation was a feat of engineering ingenuity. The living room, to the left, boasts custom woodwork, meticulously installed to breathtaking effect. "I can sit in a room like this and admire it for hours," John opines with delight. His adjacent paneled library is filled with light and overlooks the Beaver Dam River.

To the right of the foyer is a beautifully appointed dining room which leads to Caroline's dream kitchen and breakfast room. An enthusiastic cook, she loves the light, airy space. "I find it very uplifting to be in there," she says with a smile. "And, it's open to my little office, which is something I never had in my old house." A family room and conservatory complete the public areas of the house. "Rather than order a pre-fabricated English conservatory, we worked with Darren and Dan to design and build one. This is one of



RAISE A GLASS The Walkers welcomed guests Ralph Mackin, Bridgette Shaffer, Darren Mercer, Dan Divitto, and Meg Selfe for an afternoon of good cheer. After John poured champagne, he raised his glass to toast the team, and guests served themselves in Caroline's light and airy kitchen.





our favorite places to sit and watch the changing scenery," John points out.

The second floor houses the master suite as well as three family bedroom suites. Caroline's art studio and a fourth bedroom suite are on the third floor. While many of her unframed canvases—a mixture of family portraits, local landscapes and reproductions of Hudson River School paintings—are arranged in various stages of completion, a significant number of framed works are hung throughout the house to the delight of guests and family.

Gathering with Team Walker to celebrate the holidays recently, John raised a glass to toast Divitto, Mackin, and Mercer and described the bittersweet feelings he had as the project came to an end. "People were incredulous and would ask, 'Are you crazy, don't you hate your builder and architect?' And, I felt completely the opposite. It was such a great, collaborative process and so much fun. Every time we ran into a challenge individually and wondered how we would solve it, we worked together and came up with a better solution. That's where having a great architect and a great builder made this a pleasure." ■



GEORGIAN ARCHES The arched doorways and windows throughout the home illustrate the attention to detail paid in both the design and construction phases. Caroline's landscape painting of Bedford's Sunnyfield Farm hangs above daughter Lindsay's bed. Her painting of a lakeside castle hangs above an antique secretary in daughter Ann's room.