



Ahead of the Curve

The result of innovative planning and expert design, this award-winning custom home exudes grace and style

By Barbara Karth



A curved stairway and wall create an illusion of depth in the couple's open foyer, where Russian sculptor Nikolai Pakhomov fashioned the exquisite iron rail. Homeowners Linda and Jimmy Cafritz (opposite, standing) and interior designer Marlene Weiss (opposite, seated) collaborated closely with the builder and architect to make the final outcome a success.

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immy and Linda Cafritz knew exactly what they wanted in a house for their later years: location in a neighborhood where they could walk to shopping, restaurants and movies. In the community they had in mind, many existing homes were on relatively small and sometimes peculiarly shaped lots. Plus, the neighborhood had a history of rejecting “mansionization,” fully utilizing zoning laws and county regulations to retain the status quo. The Cafritzes wanted a large home, but not an oversized one, so they were content working within the guidelines.

A persistent realtor found a house, and builder Larry Cafritz, Jimmy’s son and

Linda’s stepson, began a study of the site with architect Rui Ponte. “How were we going to fit what they wanted onto a lot of that size?” Larry questioned. Tearing down the old house was the obvious answer, but that didn’t solve the problems. “This is a very shallow lot, only 90 feet deep, although it has a lot of width, 110 feet. With the setbacks required, front and

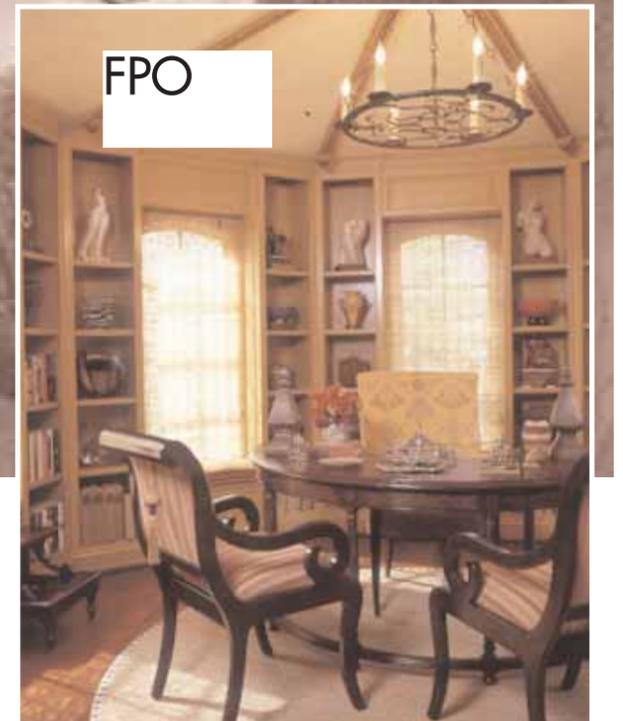
Interior Design: Marlene Weiss, Weiss Design, Bethesda, Maryland

Builder: Larry Cafritz, Laurence Cafritz Builders, Chevy Chase, Maryland

Architect: Rui Ponte, R.A. Ponte and Associates, Bethesda, Maryland

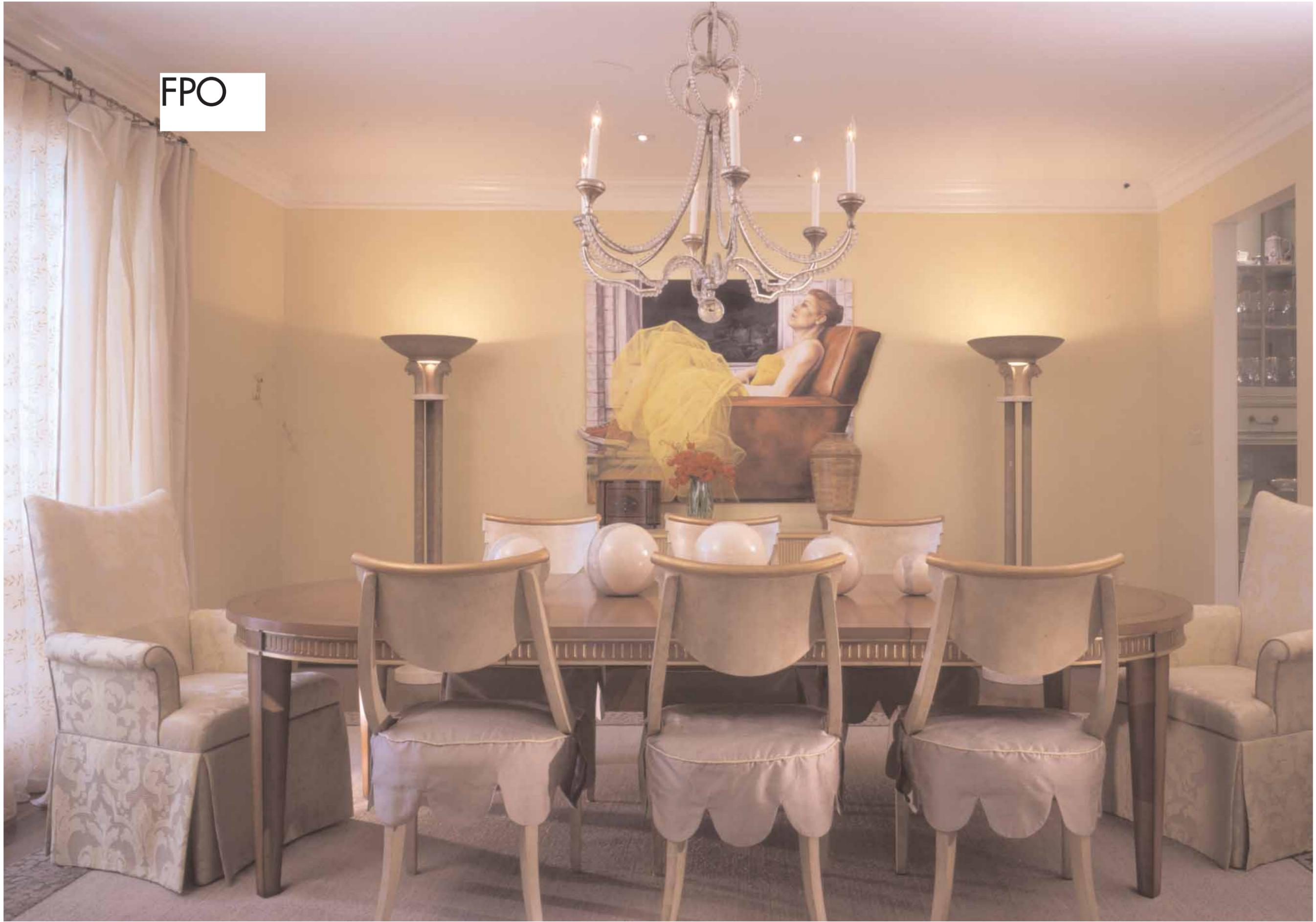
Landscape: Chris Dougherty, Gardens by Design, LLC, Washington, DC

Photography: Lydia Cutter, Arlington, Virginia



Deep ochre walls and a semi-circular desk emphasize the octagonal shape of the study (right), a stunning focal point that extends the living room (above) to the space beyond.

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back, we could only manage a 36-foot deep house.” Rui gave an affirmative nod as the one-week timeline for backing out of the contract came upon them: The house with all the features they wanted could be built on the property.

To keep the house from looking oversized, they sited it back as far as possible, eliminating a rear yard—the Cafritz were only interested in a terrace for entertaining. In the front, the shallow pitch of the roof and a retaining wall with gradual step-ups from the sidewalk visually modify the height.

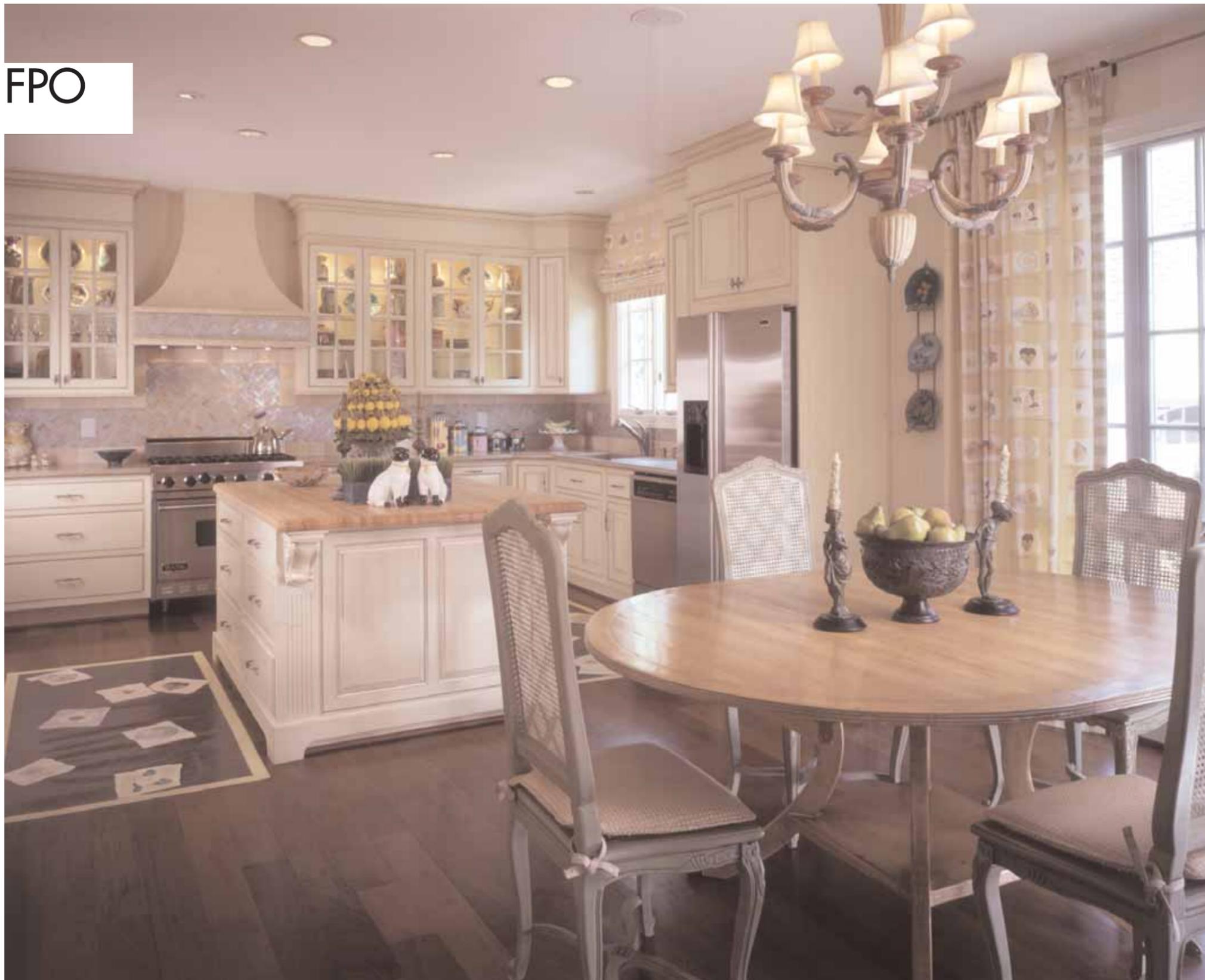
Larry explains the architect’s concept: “His vision was to create the illusion of depth with an open foyer leading to a curved stairway backed by a curved wall of windows from floor to ceiling... giving the perception that the house is deeper than it is. The entire house was designed around that one particular element.”

It was this focal point that proved to be the most problematic during the construction process. “Curves are always difficult,” Larry explains. “We framed out the curved wall, put the windows in and made templates to match the curvature for the heavy, pre-built Brazilian walnut stairs. When they arrived, we set up a pulley system and hoisted them up into place and then took them out to build-out specific areas of the wall.

“The rails were equally difficult because they have the curvature as well. We had these code requirements, not even a four-inch-sphere can pass through any part of that railing, or between the glass and the stair stringer against the wall. You have to be dead on with your dimensions.”



A painting by Linda Cafritz is hung on runners and opens in two panels to reveal a television in the family room (above). In the dining room (previous spread), a painting from the owners’ collection makes a bold statement above chairs swathed in fabric from Bergamo.



Decorative tile and concrete countertops give the warm, happy kitchen a bit of an edge.

Working within all these code requirements, iron sculptor Nikolai Pakhomov created the exquisite rails, a specialty from his days in the former Soviet Union where he fabricated incredible works for the homes of Gromyko, Brezhnev, Gorbachev and Shevardnadze, often including inserts of silver, malachite, turquoise and other materials typical of jewelry creations.

The entrance of the house teases—compression giving way to expansion. Relatively narrow at the entrance, the foyer is flanked by shelving displaying the Cafritzes' colorful glass collection. At the same time, the eye is drawn to the two-story rear hallway and staircase, the tall windows, the out-of-doors and a deep vista, a reversal of today's typical new home. Otherwise, the home is traditional in its layout; the living room, an adjacent library and the family room are on the right of the central foyer with the dining room and kitchen to the left.

In case the stairs become difficult in their later years, the Cafritzes installed an elevator. "At this stage of life we just had to put it in. Hopefully we won't have to use it except for luggage," says the lively and energetic Linda.

The master bedroom and bath, along with a working office and three guest bedrooms, are on the second floor, including a large artist's studio for Linda over the garage. A talented abstract painter who has had several one-person shows, Linda often retreats to this sunny space, where she creates her signature pieces for interior designers and private clients alike.

As the house was taking shape, Linda was exercising at her gym when she met interior designer Marlene Weiss. "We liked each other right away; we speak the same language," Marlene explains.

“Because we are both visual,” chimes in Linda. “She’s an artist, too; that’s her background.” Conversation continues at rapid pace. “Marlene and I are kindred spirits; we connected immediately; we see things the same way, colors, materials ...”

“We finish each other’s sentences,” adds Marlene.

“Like an old married couple,” laughs Linda. Energy bursts from the two like a fireworks display on the Fourth of July. This same energy and personality permeates the home.

“Linda had wonderful things to work with,” says Marlene. Many pieces had been purchased relatively recently for their previous home, but new pieces were added. So the designer’s task was to place them, often in different “juxtapositions”—a word Linda and Marlene find frequently applicable as they talk of home and art. Some existing furnishings were recovered or touched by the artistry of a faux finisher, like the two French chairs in the living room.

Linda enjoys telling the story of how they had moved in with furniture placed in the living room according to plan. Everything was in order, except they needed a tea table. “Marlene is as impatient as I am. It’s like everything has to be done that second, finished, done,” she emphatically explains. “So Marlene said, ‘I am going down to the Design Center.’ She knows my taste exactly; she was back four hours later.”

“I put it in my car,” Marlene explains. “I couldn’t have slept until I found the right table. I am very hands-on.”

“I would say to her, ‘I would love a gorgeous glass chest or piece...’ and she would know,” recalls Linda. In each room Marlene added, accentuated and arranged. A pair of chairs from J. Lambeth completes the seating arrangement in front of the living room



Soft blues create a soothing atmosphere in the romantic master bedroom.



Artist Linda Cafritz spends hours painting in her sunny new studio (above). An equally cheerful yellow accentuates the home's Mediterranean-style exterior (opposite).

window. Sheers with a leaf pattern augment draperies from the previous house. Marlene echoed the motif in the border on the dining room rug.

Deep ochre walls and a semi-circular desk emphasize the octagonal shape of the study, a stunning focal point extending the living room to the space beyond. In each window sill, stacks of three slender cushions in an Oriental-style silk contrast with the hard surfaces of the books, art glass and collectibles.

In the family room, new woven shades complement the window treatments. Linda's ingenuity is evident in her painting over the fireplace—really a diptych. Hung on runners, each half slides to the side, opening to reveal a hidden television niche.

In the powder room, Marlene used a textured golden wallpaper to highlight the Asian cabinet that Larry transformed into a vanity. Selections from Linda's collection of evening bags hang on the walls.

Upstairs, the master bedroom is Marlene Weiss inspired. Originally Linda anticipated a repeat of her previous bedroom which was yellow and leopard. Marlene presented a romantic new approach, one that matches the eyes of the couple, sparkling blue. Two enormous walk-in closets and an elegant master bath complete the suite. Comfortable guest bedrooms and lower-level entertainment and play rooms

were designed with the couple's grandchildren in mind.

When it came to selecting a shade for the home's exterior, Linda and Marlene relied on their shared sense of color. "I had four colors that I picked and I said, 'Marlene, you just have to help me. What do you think?'" recalls Linda.

"When we took the samples out into the sun, they died. Linda wanted something Mediterranean," Marlene recalls. The Cafritzes had selected Rui for his Mediterranean-style homes, the stucco and chic exterior detailing. So on the second try, they found their color: a sunny Tuscan yellow.

The Cafritzes have a home with all the features they wanted in their choice of neighborhoods. In addition, it won Larry three prestigious builder's awards, including the 2002 Custom Builder Award of Excellence in the category of best custom home designed and built to the unique requirements of the client from the Maryland National Capital Building Industry Association.

The result of fruitful collaboration among its builder, architect, homeowners and interior designer, this one-of-a-kind home exceeds the Cafritzes' best expectations. With its cheerful colors and abundance of light, Linda says, "It's happy." ❖

Contributing editor Barbara Karth is based in Chevy Chase, Maryland.

RESOURCES

Floral Design: David Millspaugh, Washington, DC.
Hardwood Floors: Brazilian walnut, Nash Floors, Washington, DC, and Rockville, MD.

FOYER

Center Table: Niermann Weeks, Washington, DC. **Staircase:** Iron Masters, Gaithersburg, MD. **Custom Staircase:** Crown Stairs, Gaithersburg, MD. **Chandelier:** Mike Weeks at J. Lambeth, Washington, DC. **Area Rugs:** Floor Gallery, Rockville, MD.

LIVING ROOM

Sofa: Swaim, Beacon Hill, Washington, DC. **Sofa Fabric:** Bergamo, Washington, DC. **Cocktail Table:** Nancy Corzine, Washington, DC. **Mirrored End Table:** Niermann Weeks, Washington, DC. **Chairs:** J. Lambeth, Washington, DC. **Chairs Fabric:** Bergamo, Washington, DC. **Lamps:** Donghia, Washington, DC. **Mirror:** Niermann Weeks, Washington, DC. **Wall Sconces:** Amy Howard at J. Lambeth, Washington, DC. **Console:** Amy Howard at J. Lambeth, Washington, DC. **Small Cocktail Tables:** Mike Weeks at J. Lambeth, Washington, DC. **Window Treatment Fabrication:** Carol Studios, Fairfax, VA. **Window Treatment Fabric:** Craig Studios, New York, NY. **Parchment Treatment on Walls:** Michael Thrift, Grand Facades, Silver Spring, MD.

STUDY

Custom Built-ins: MKM Classic Millwork, Jessup, MD. **Desk:** Guy Chaddock at J. Lambeth, Washington, DC. **Chairs:** Swaim, Beacon Hill, Washington, DC. **Chairs Fabric:** Bergamo, Washington, DC. **Window Treatments:** Conrad Shades, Duncan Huggins Perez, Washington, DC. **Pull-Up Chairs:** Peter Alexander, Miami, FL. **Pull-Up Chair Fabric:** Bergamo, Washington, DC. **Seat Cushions:** Carol Studios, Fairfax, VA. **Seat Cushions Fabric:** Bergamo, Washington, DC. **Chandelier:** Holly Hunt, Washington, DC. **Rug:**

Floor Gallery, Rockville, MD. **Ceiling Treatment:** Ornamental Plaster Works, Fairfax, VA. **Wall Treatment:** Michael Thrift, Grand Facades, Silver Spring, MD.

DINING ROOM

Table: J. Lambeth, Washington, DC. **Chairs:** Swaim, Beacon Hill, Washington, DC. **Chairs Fabric:** Bergamo, Washington, DC. **Window Treatments:** Carol Studios, Fairfax, VA. **Window Treatment Fabric:** Craig Studios, New York, NY. **Rug:** Stark Carpet, Washington, DC. **Chandelier:** Niermann Weeks, Washington, DC. **Painting:** Owners' collection.

FAMILY ROOM

Sofa: Swaim, Beacon Hill, Washington, DC. **Sofa Fabric:** Bergamo, Washington, DC. **Cocktail Table:** Niermann Weeks, Washington, DC. **Window Treatments:** Carol Studios, Fairfax, VA. **Window Treatments Fabric:** Bergamo, Washington, DC. **Carpet:** Floor Gallery, Rockville, MD. **Antique Étagère:** Ambiance, Washington, DC. **Artwork:** Linda Cafritz.

KITCHEN

Custom Cabinetry & Maple Butcherblock: Cabico through Montgomery Kitchens and Bath, Gaithersburg, MD. **Concrete Countertops:** Concrete Jungle, Frederick, MD. **Tile:** Architectural Ceramics, Rockville, MD.

MASTER BEDROOM

Window Treatments: Carol Studios, Fairfax, VA. **Window Treatments Fabric & Trim:** Osborne & Little, Washington, DC. **Window Sheers:** Pindler and Pindler, Washington, DC. **Carpet:** Fabrica, Washington, DC. **Chandelier:** Maurice Electric, Rockville, MD. **Bedding:** Carol Studios, Fairfax, VA. **Wall Treatment:** Michael Thrift, Grand Facades, Silver Spring, MD.

