

# **2023 AIA | DC Chapter Design Awards**

**Project Title:** Clerestory House

**Location:** Bethesda, MD

**Date of Completion:** 06/01/2022

**Project Statement:**

The neighborly split-level single-family residence is often seen as a less desirable housing type, with many homes of this size in the DC region simply torn down in lieu of remodeling. This project chose instead to celebrate the split-level through fun layering of vertical vantage points and unexpected connections. A new generous slot was created at the front of the house to form a new entrance. The slot aligns with the split-level stairs and a new series of interior openings, culminating in large windows opening to the wooded backyard. The great room plays a supporting role in linking different spatial relationships, encompassing the experience in the compressed kitchen volume through to the view from the elevated hall navigating between rooms above the garage, thus creating a multi-dimensional experience while still being economical in form and construction.

**Design Narrative: How does this project address Design for Integration, Wellbeing, and Discovery?**

Daylit and simple in form, Clerestory House was designed to provide privacy while linking the house to the site. A new roof, featuring a thick insulation package and punctured by skylights, allowed for an open plan beneath while the new clerestory enhances the interior's natural lighting while maintaining its privacy to the street.

**Community Engagement: How does this project address Design for Equitable Communities and Economy?**

Located in a smaller-scale neighborhood where many residents walk to local parks, a community recreation center, and public transportation, this project set out to be a good neighbor on the street. We intentionally kept the massing significantly smaller than a full two story home, taking advantage of the original split-level structure and site topography to step down toward the neighborhood side of the site.

**Sustainability and Resilience: How does this project address Design for Ecosystems, Water, Energy, Resources, and Change?** Material selections were made for economy in most cases. Existing wood floors were refinished where possible. Most wall surfaces are drywall, often wrapped in simple trim material with clean detailing. But these plain sculptural surfaces are enough to create a canvas for sunlight as a natural decoration. In the great room, mirrored glass was used selectively to create depth of space, occasionally engaging the clerestory band of windows at surprising points. In the face of global supply chain challenges, windows were ordered extremely early in the process in order to fit the construction timeline. Allowances for installation precision were resolved through a finishing batton pattern that provided flexibility and playfulness where the building meets the sky.

## Clerestory House

Daylit and simple in form, Clerestory House is a renovation that makes three strategic moves to provide privacy and link the house to the site. The existing low-pitch roof on this 1950's split-level was removed and replaced with a full elevation band of clerestory windows. Above the new windows, a new flat roof was added. Punctuated by skylights and providing a thick insulation package, this roof swap allowed for an open plan beneath, while the new clerestory enhances the interior's natural lighting while maintaining its privacy to the street.

The existing brick walls wrapping the structure of the home were punctured to establish a prominent connection between the house and its front and rear yards. A new generous slot was created at the front of the house to form a new entrance. The slot aligns with the split-level stairs and a new series of interior openings, culminating in large windows opening to its wooded backyard. The large windows at the rear of the house feel as though they are part of the public portion of the house, but actually belong to the primary suite.

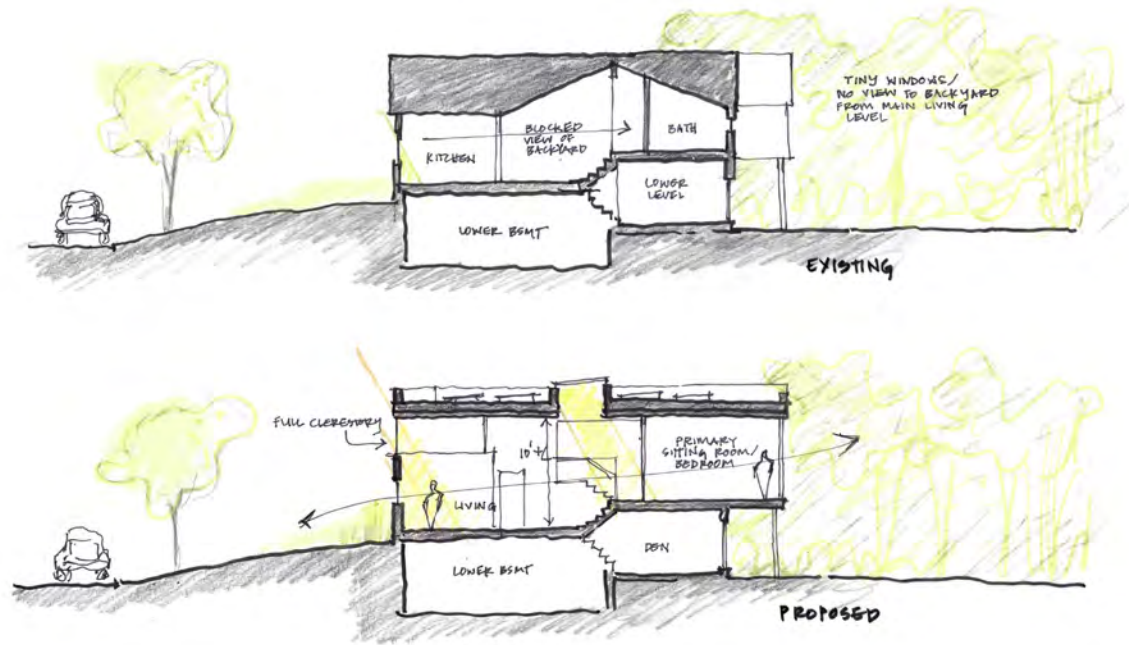
The last move was to add two additions to the house. One small addition to the North provides for a new kitchen, and forges a new pathway through the split-level building for its inhabitants to be able to enjoy the garden from their main living level. A new patio marks this connection in the private protected area accessed directly from the kitchen. The second addition included a garage with two bedrooms above. By setting the garage at a lower level, we were able to keep the height of this new two story addition down, closer to the original height of the existing house and the other mid-century homes in the neighborhood.





(above) Front view of Clerestory House

(left) View through front door, up split-level stairs, to primary bedroom with views to garden beyond



(above) Schematic Design sketches



(below) Before view, from living level



(below right) After view from upper hallway through primary suite sitting area to backyard



After view from living level

The primary bedroom sitting area frames the view to the backyard when the large pocket door separating the space is open



(left) Entrance vestibule showing the existing original brick wall. The clerestory windows continue across the doors and the same paving material was used both inside and out to enhance the indoor/ outdoor relationship

(below) View of the rear of the house at night. Three of the four bedrooms have views to the rear garden. The new kitchen patio provides access to the rear yard from the main living space which didn't exist before the renovation.

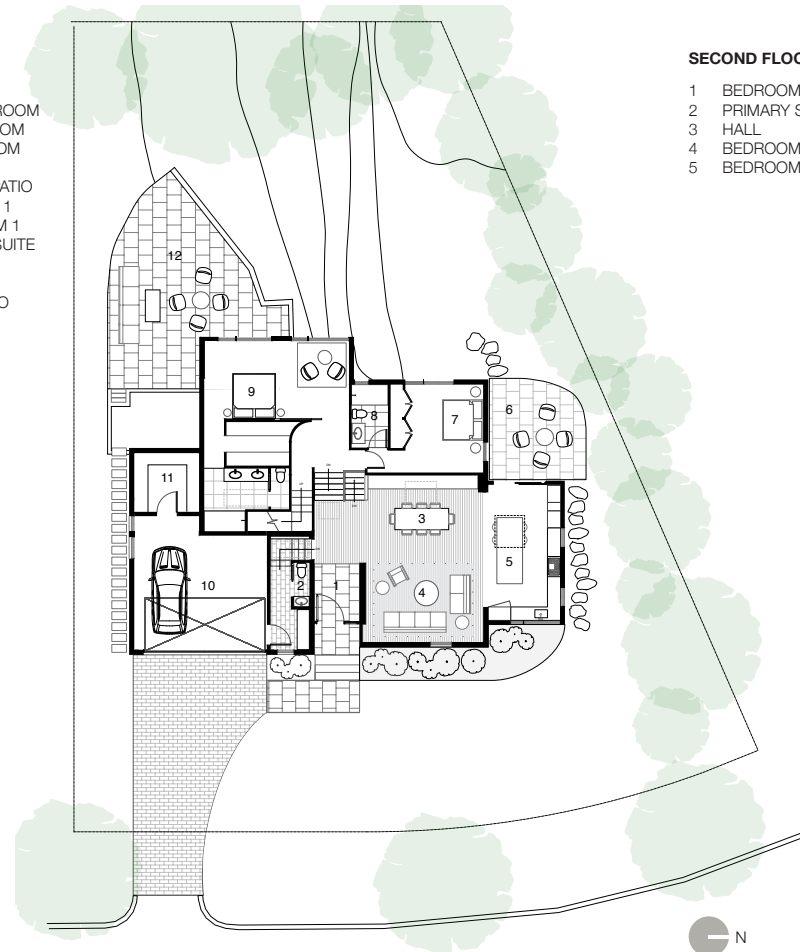




Selectively placed mirrors were an inexpensive way to create spatial depth and visual interest

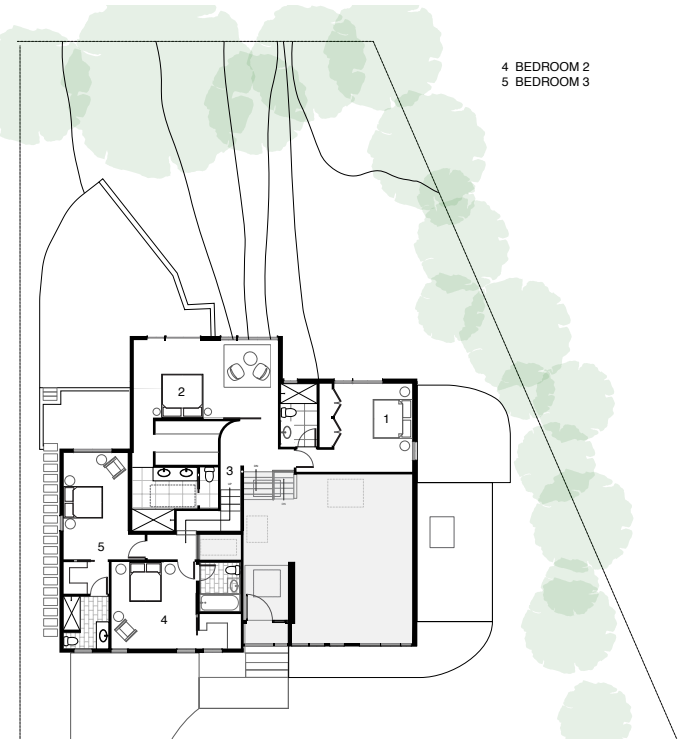
**FIRST FLOOR**

- 1 FOYER
- 2 POWDER ROOM
- 3 DINING ROOM
- 4 LIVING ROOM
- 5 KITCHEN
- 6 KITCHEN PATIO
- 7 BEDROOM 1
- 8 BATHROOM 1
- 9 PRIMARY SUITE
- 10 GARAGE
- 11 STORAGE
- 12 BACK PATIO



**SECOND FLOOR**

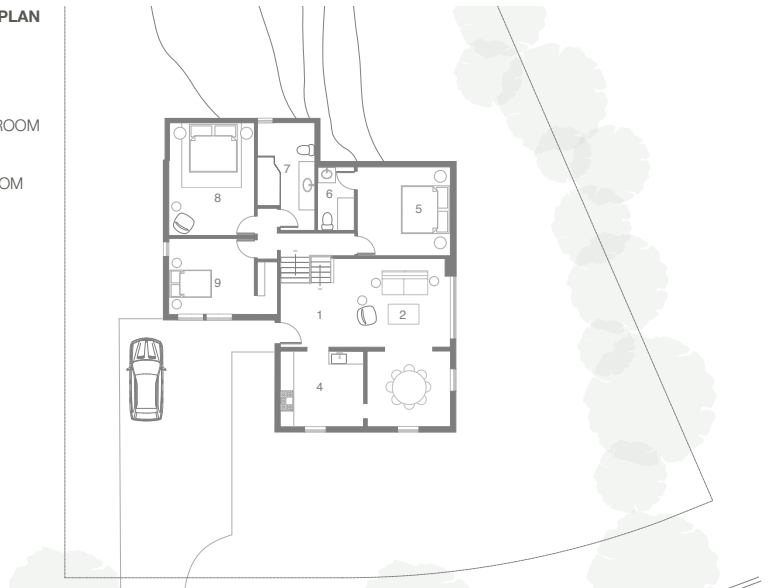
- 1 BEDROOM
- 2 PRIMARY SUITE
- 3 HALL
- 4 BEDROOM 2
- 5 BEDROOM 3

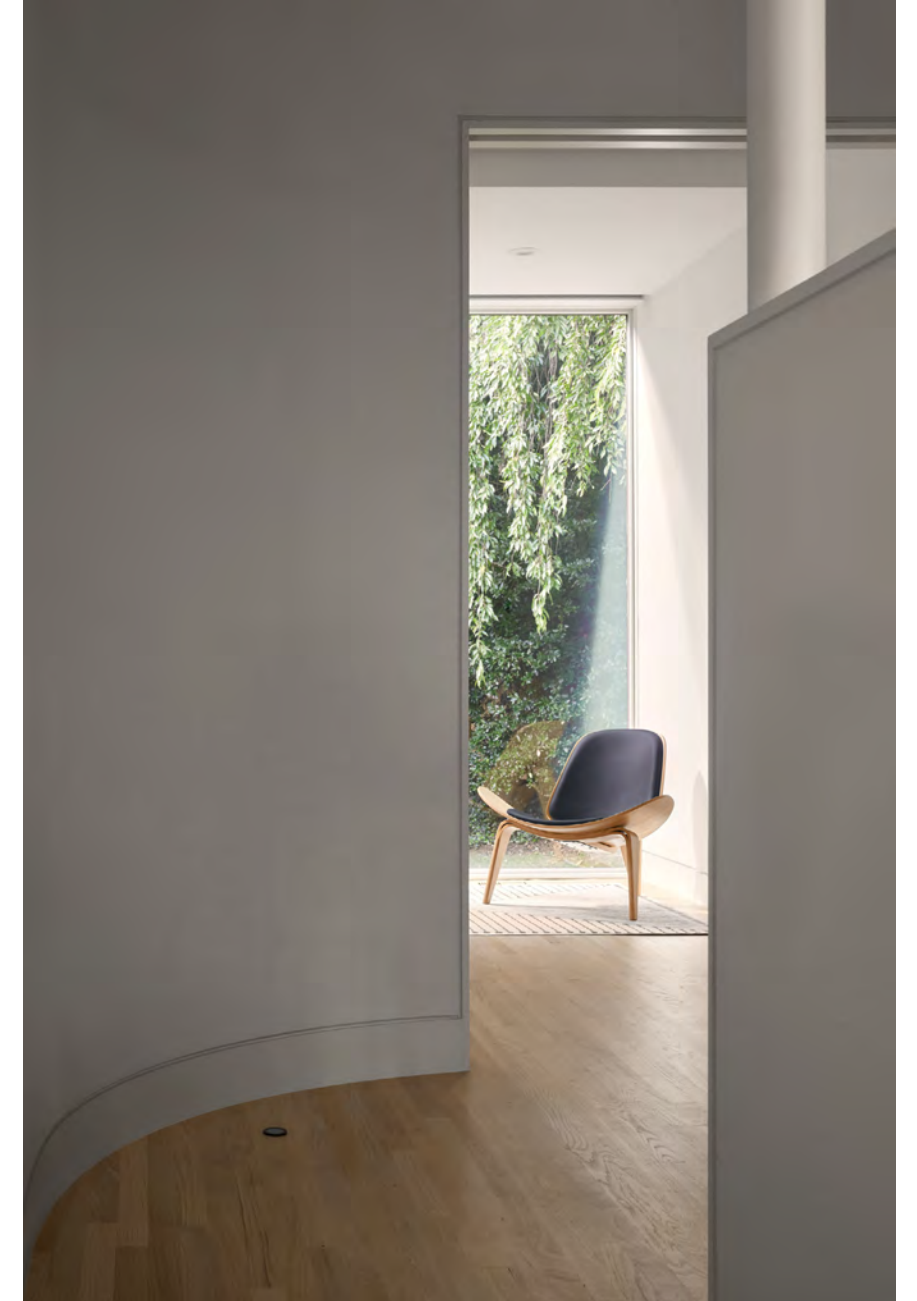


- 4 BEDROOM 2
- 5 BEDROOM 3

**ORIGINAL FLOOR PLAN**

- 1 FOYER
- 2 LIVING ROOM
- 3 DINING ROOM
- 4 KITCHEN
- 5 PRIMARY BEDROOM
- 6 PRIMARY BATH
- 7 BATHROOM
- 8 GUEST BEDROOM
- 9 BEDROOM





(above) View from the dining room toward the garage, powder room, and new bedrooms above the garage. Using economical drywall walls and simple painted trim, we used spatial depth and masking of vertical planes to provide a playful peekaboo view toward the private areas of the house.

(right) A curved wall at the top of the stairs holds a 5' pocket door to close off the primary bedroom when needed for privacy.

(left) Before view showing the split-level stairs that remained and the original ceiling roofline

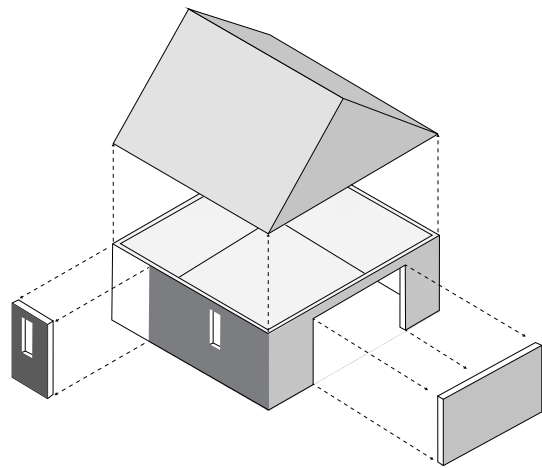


(above) To span the living room and dining room without columns, an economical but dimensionally deep joist system was designed. This provided potential for deep skylight openings that wash the space with light all throughout the day.

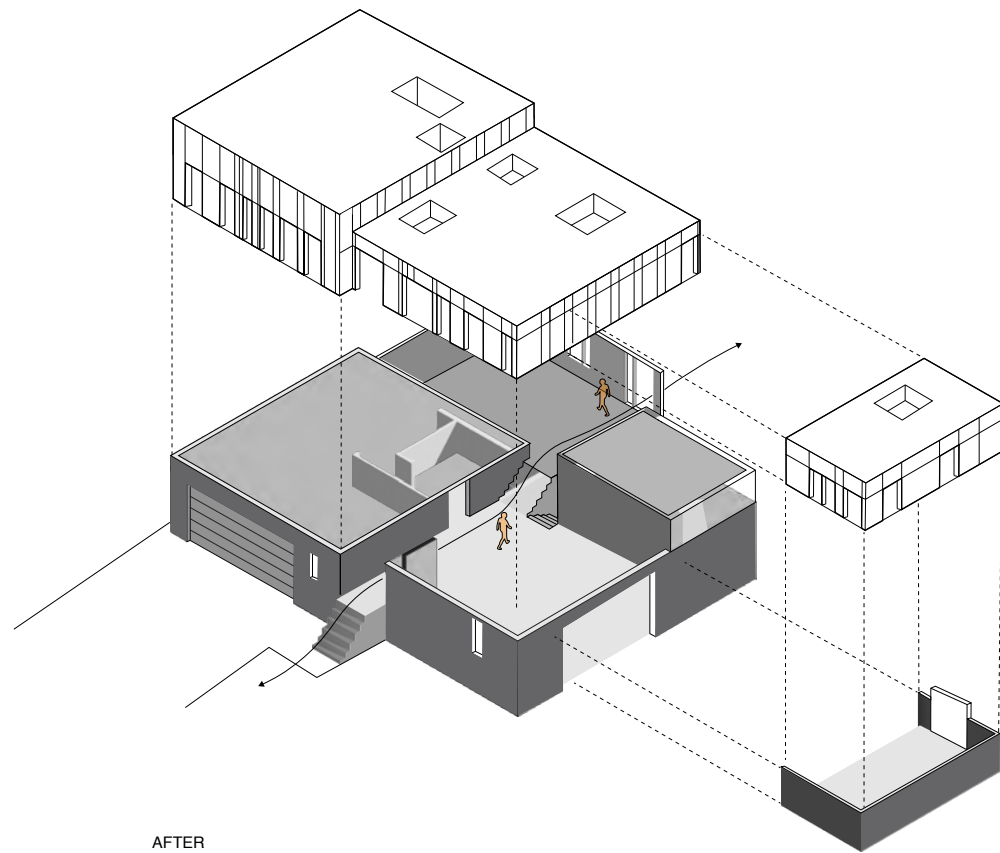


(right) A mirror turns the corner along the clerestory windows to visually elongate the band of windows.





BEFORE



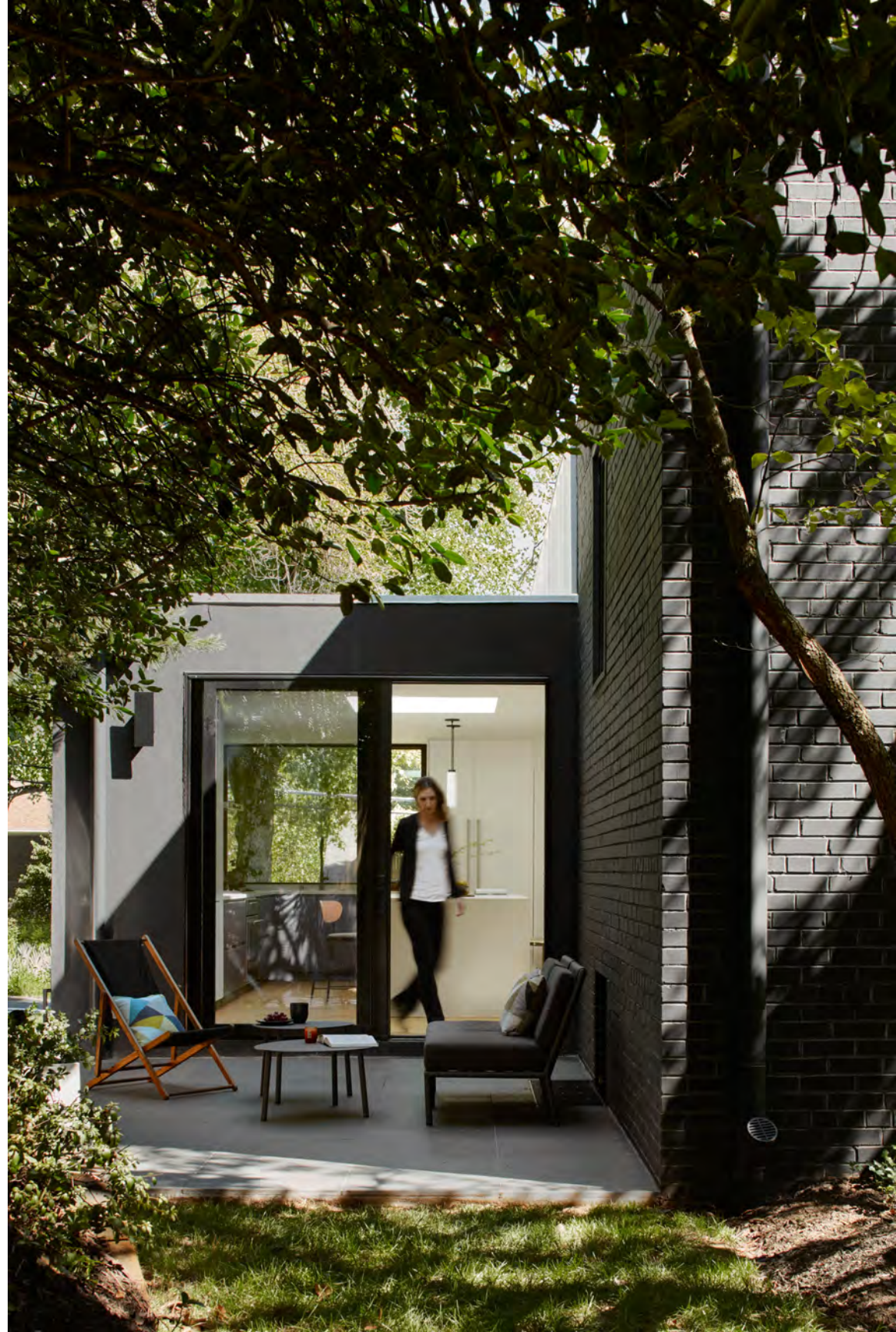
AFTER



The neighborly split-level single-family residence is often seen as a less desirable housing type, with many homes of this size in the DC region simply torn down in lieu of remodeling. This project celebrates the split-level through fun layering of vertical vantage points and unexpected connections. The great room is the key instrument linking different spatial relationships, from within the compressed kitchen volume through to the view from the elevated hall navigating between rooms above the garage, creating a multi-dimensional experience while still being economical in form and construction.

(left) before view, from neighborhood  
(right) after view, from neighborhood





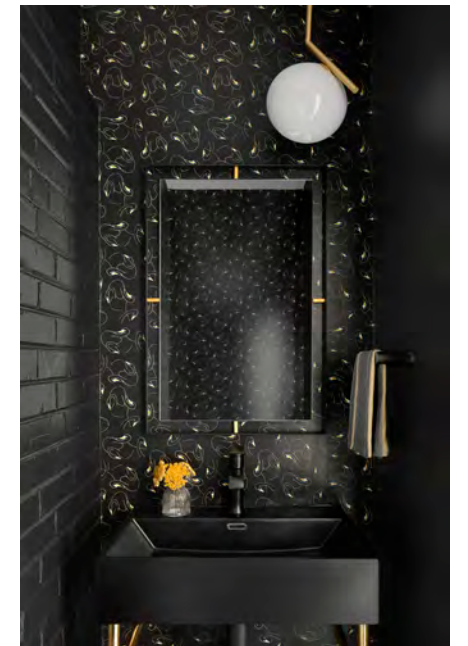
A small addition made to the north side of the existing house provides for a new kitchen, and forges a new pathway through the split-level building for its inhabitants to be able to enjoy the garden from their main living level. A new patio marks this connection in the private protected area accessed directly from the kitchen. Originally planning for a kitchen from overseas that wasn't possible with global shortages, the design team worked with available IKEA cabinetry and detailed creative solutions for a custom look.





(above) Bedroom view, with pocket door open to the hallway

(above right) Powder room – exposed brick from the original exterior of the house was re-fashioned as a design element in the new space



(left) exterior view of the bedroom suite