

ROCK 'N' ROLL MAKEOVER

An Alexandria family refines and updates Foo Fighter Dave Grohl's former home and studio.

By Jennifer Sergent

Photography by Stacy Zarin Goldberg



LEARNING TO FLY Clockwise from left: A cozy dining space in the kitchen; sculptural lighting welcomes guests; floor-to-ceiling windows usher in living-room light.

They were drawn by the acre-plus lot size in a quiet enclave of Alexandria. But when Robert and Amanda Nichols went to see what would soon be their home, they found something that “looked like an old shed,” Amanda recalls, with a bridge to the entry that was shrouded in overgrowth. Yet the windowless facade held a colorful past. The 1979 house was heralded in the *Washington Post* for its modern experiment with passive-solar heating. More than 20 years later, Foo Fighters frontman Dave Grohl moved in, and the band recorded its albums *There is Nothing Left to Lose* and *One by One* in the basement.

While such details make for interesting conversation, they presented a variety of quirks that the Nichols would have to overcome if they were to live there comfortably with their three children. “It’s a great before picture,” architect Donald Lococo (donaldlococoarchitects.com) remembers thinking when he first saw what he describes as a rare example of Brutalist residential architecture. “It was a faceless, utilitarian style. There was no sense of welcome and no sense of arrival.”

And while a two-story wall of windows in the closed-off central atrium absorbed the sun’s heat in the summer or redistributed it in the winter, the heat-sink effect just made the house hot—all the time. “The CONTINUED...





LIGHT FANTASTIC Clockwise from left: The light-filled dining room features creamy neutrals throughout; pale woods cover the floors and cabinetry of the kitchen; the abundantly welcoming exterior.



...CONTINUED passive experiment failed miserably," Lococo says. Grohl, meanwhile, had fortified the basement with three layers of drywall for soundproofing and mounted video cameras on every wall. But little attention went to the rest of the house—one reason, perhaps, that squirrels and woodpeckers had taken up residence.

The first order of business (besides evicting the wildlife) was dismantling the glass walls that enclosed the atrium, which is now the dining room. The Nichols then hired Lococo along with interior designers Kelly Schuler and Megan Madigan to make sense of it all.

Next, Lococo combined what had been a separate kitchen, family room and screened porch into one glass-enclosed space, punching through the dark-wood siding to create expansive views of the lush property. "You can tell the difference in spring," Lococo says of the new transparency. "You really do follow nature."

And because nature is so abundant outside, Schuler indulged her clients' desire for a clean, organic look inside. Creamy neutrals govern the palette, while grass cloth on the walls lends texture. Smooth, pale woods cover the floors and cabinetry—a refined iteration of the

rough, bark-like look of the home's original siding. "We wanted to make sure the [interior] skin was warm and inviting, and let the architecture do all the talking," Schuler says.

Besides expanding the deck space that surrounds the house, Lococo's one major design addition was a new split-level foyer and mudroom. Before, the front door opened straight into the stairs, with little room for circulation. "There was no process, no sense of arrival, no queuing," Lococo says, referring to a layout that makes it clear where to proceed into the house. Now, guests enter a spacious, light-filled foyer, which leads down to the dining room on one end and around to a mudroom on the other.

Four years after completion, the Nichols are renovating again, this time transforming the old recording studio in the basement to a gym, home theater and game room for the kids—so Grohl's extra soundproofing will come in handy.

There's also one relic left over from the home's passive-solar experiment: The puffy, NASA-like reflective foil shades that lower automatically over the huge window wall in the dining room. Besides being great for show and tell, Amanda says, "[They] keep the cold out during the polar vortex." ■

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