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Perched on a hill near the manicured greens of a Nashville country club, Becky and Jimmy Webb's 1950s flat-roof modern is as classic as a Hank Williams song, but its new addition is a little more refined.



"Nashville's changing," says architect Price Harrison. "In the last ten years it's been totally revitalized." In that spirit, Harrison designed a bedroom addition for this classic modern, marrying '50s style with 21st-century convenience.

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This is the story of a Nashville family who saved a '50s modern (flat roof and all) and, with the help of a very sympathetic architect, turned it into a showpiece that seamlessly blends classic mid-century style with millennial convenience and luxury.

Flat-roofed houses generally haven't fared well in the South. For one thing, the clean, spare style of a classic modern hasn't been widely accepted in a region where tradition and traditional styles reign. But perhaps even more than the style, the flat roof itself can intimidate potential owners. Fifty years ago, most architects and contractors simply hadn't figured out how to build a durable and dependably drainable flat roof for a home. As Nashville architect Price Harrison explains, "Most people just tear them down because they don't want to deal with them."

But not Becky and Jimmy Webb, who bought their home in 1993. It had been on the market for over a year, despite its prime location on the edge of the Hillwood Country Club in the 1950s-era, large-lot suburb of Hillwood. No one wanted the house, it seemed. But Becky, an interior decorator, and Jimmy, who owns a real estate management business, fell in love with it.

It's not hard to see why. Designed by the small Nashville firm of Taylor & Crabtree and built in 1955, the Webbs' home is a comfortable marriage of the International Style's ordered geometry and the "natural house" materials and detailing of late-period Frank Lloyd Wright. Gray Tennessee limestone forms the exterior walls and interior piers, which bear the load of exposed hardwood roof beams. Large expanses of floor-to-ceiling windows abound, particularly in the long, front-facing

The L-shape of the house encloses a serene, secluded backyard. As part of the expansion, the architect reoriented the master bedroom (at right in photo below) to take advantage of the verdant view.





Project: Webb Residence
Architect: Taylor & Crabtree (1955)
Renovation: Price Harrison (2002)
Location: Nashville, Tennessee



"I like it all being on one level. It's not a typical ranch. And I love the details. I love the rock walls. I love the beams."

living/dining room, which has a commanding hilltop view of the wooded neighborhood. ("The best thing in the whole house," says Becky, "is to sit in the living room and see the full moon come up through the front windows.") The original floors of oak and terrazzo tile have aged well and add to the earthy feeling of the house. With its rustic building materials and low-slung profile, the house fits snugly into its tree-shaded setting.

"It was just a feeling," Becky replies when asked what first appealed to her about the house. "I like it all being on one level. It's not a typical ranch. And I love the details. I love the rock walls. I love the beams."

In addition, she says, because they have three sons (then aged 7, 8, and 11), the L-shaped open plan of the house, its five bedrooms, large yard, and spacious 5,000

square feet suited the family well. So the Webbs were willing to look past a few major issues: a leaking roof, lack of a proper master suite, and the encroachment of a nearby gated community.

When it was built, the Webbs' house was beautifully isolated atop a small hillock, adjacent to the golf greens of the country club. But in the late 1980s, a little do-si-do between a previous owner of the home, a neighbor, and the country club created a parcel of property sandwiched between the country club and the house. Today that property is a small gated community of which the Webb house is now part. Next to the outsized ersatz colonials, federals, and regencies, the Webbs' modern looks distinctly discreet and tasteful—a beautiful iconoclast on the edge of a crowded hodgepodge. ▶

Among the home's amenities are (clockwise from bottom left) an original 1950s St. Charles kitchen, limestone rock walls, a dining room with a commanding view, sleek new built-ins designed by Price Harrison, and a Cassina Cab chair by Mario Bellini. **● p. 136**



Despite the new development, the Webbs grew more attached to their house and suffered through roof repairs, electrical upgrades, and rerouting of exposed ductwork.

Enter Price Harrison, who had apprenticed in the New York offices of Paul Rudolph, Richard Meier, and I. M. Pei during the 1980s and 1990s before moving back to Tennessee in 1998. The Webbs had an inside track to Harrison, because the architect's mother and Jimmy's mother are close friends. Harrison was taken with the Webbs' house from the moment he saw it.

"I would always talk about it whenever I would see Jimmy and Becky or Jim's mom," says Harrison. "I tend not to do a lot of additions, because it's hard for me to do an addition to a traditional house without it looking alien to the original house. But I felt like I could do something that wasn't a slavish imitation and yet be consistent with what was basically a '50s idiom." ▶



"There's a certain abstraction and serenity that you get with these spaces," says architect Harrison. "You're creating a world that's a little more organized than the real world."

The new master suite addition is a luxurious oasis of calm. Details include French limestone floors and fixtures in the bathroom, mahogany trim, cherry floors, and an artful headboard/shelving unit.





"I didn't want a big bedroom. I wanted a big closet," says Becky Webb. In fact, she got a huge bedroom, two bathrooms with adjoining shower, and two walk-in closets. Her closet is pictured.

When the Webbs first moved into the house, Harrison had designed built-in desks and cabinets for the boys' rooms that the Webbs were very happy with. By 1995, he and the Webbs had begun brainstorming about the possibilities for building them a proper master suite.

The existing master bedroom was deficient in a few major ways. An addition to the original house, it seemed very much a poorly arranged afterthought—a make-do floor plan, with the entrance to the room running past the master bathroom and small closet. What's more, the bedroom was exceedingly dark, with only a small array of windows on one side.

Rather than present the Webbs with a pat solution, Harrison discussed the addition in conversations that spanned several years—construction didn't begin until May 2001. "We built models of different schemes," says Harrison. "It was very interactive. It wasn't like I went to an office and came back and said, 'This is it!'"

The Webbs wanted more natural light, more bathroom space and storage, and a more sensible layout. What they got was a 1,400-square-foot master suite, complete with his-and-hers bathrooms tied together with a shared shower, roomy his-and-hers walk-in closets, and a cozy workout room. The addition is of a piece with the rest of the house, yet at the same time it's a thoroughly modern space that is a clearly demarcated refuge from the boys' rooms just down the hallway. It's a spacious retreat bathed in natural light on three sides, thanks to large banks of windows on the north and south sides and east-facing clerestory windows that were Becky's idea. The new windows reorient the bedroom's focus away from the south (and the new development), and instead

toward the relaxing view of the secluded, grassy backyard and courtyard formed by the shape of the house.

Among the suite's luxurious appointments are mahogany trim, cherry floors, cream-colored French limestone floors in the baths, glass sink bowls that light up, a stylish built-in headboard cum shelving unit, and bathroom pocket doors that open and close with the wave of a hand—thanks to electric eyes and a pneumatic mechanism originally designed for buses.

On the exterior, Harrison smoothly integrated the addition with the existing house by continuing the limestone walls and adding a new ribbon of deep brown copper fascia rimming the roofline across the entire house. The horizontal continuity allowed Harrison to raise the master suite's roofline to make way for the clerestory windows and a ceiling height of 11 feet, matching the height in public rooms such as the front living room. During construction, it was determined that the deteriorating roof had to be replaced, which allowed the copper fascia to be consistent all around the house.

Today, the Webbs are so pleased with their new bedroom, finished in May 2002, that they are planning more projects with Harrison, including a remodeled front door with more windows to brighten a dark foyer and a glass-and-mahogany enclosure on the edge of their backyard that will allow for a screened-porch area.

"I didn't want a big bedroom. I wanted a big closet," Becky says with a laugh. "And I got it. I really did. . . . I got lucky. It's just such a wonderful peaceful feeling to have everything focused out that direction," she says, pointing out her new windows to her lush, sun-dappled backyard. "It makes me a lot happier." ■

Right: To blend the exterior of the original house with the addition, the architect extended the limestone rock walls and trimmed the roof with a new, broader ribbon of copper fascia.

