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industrial goes upscale in Cherry Hill



BY BRIDGET MCQUATE ■ PHOTOS BY VINCENT CORSO

High-tech but simple. That was the contradictory...and compelling...mandate the owners presented to the architects hired to design their new home in Cherry Hill, N.J. Empty nesters who own a high-end lighting manufacturing company, the owners saw designing their home as a dual opportunity: Create a functional, contemporary living environment and an ideal showcase for their lighting fixtures.

SRK Architects, of Philadelphia, was in a unique position to meet this challenge. All three founding partners had worked in the offices of the late Louis I. Kahn, the famed Philadelphia architect known for his ultra-modern, yet simple, structures.

SRK introduced the high-tech theme on the interior with the use of steel for all exposed structural elements: the ceiling trusses, stairways and a bridge that connects two opposite wings of the house through the central living space. Made in South Philadelphia, the custom-designed steel components are not just decorative. SRK's Partner in Charge Karl Krumholz, AIA, says, "There's no applied decoration to this house. Everything you see is part of the structure. It's all true and honest."

Here's where fun with lighting comes into play: The steel ceiling beams are lined with tiny lamps on wires to highlight the metal elements and add drama, especially at night.



The central living space is notable for its sleek, clean flow and monochromatic palette. Distinctive lighting and furniture define the spaces and functions.

stripped-down and sleek

Achieving such simplicity takes a tremendous amount of forethought. Krumholz says, "The goal here was to create a place for everything; nothing should interrupt the clean flow of space." The detailing has an intentionally stripped-down, sleek look ... no baseboards, no trim around windows and no traditional doors and walls separating rooms.

A monochromatic palette is consistent throughout the house, with limited splashes of color provided by art objects, like a carousel horse in the living room. The richness of the detail keeps the décor from appearing stark or spartan.

The enormous kitchen opens directly onto the great room. Defining the end of the kitchen is not a wall but a breakfast bar with metal base, glass top and lighting accents shining through the glass from below. The kitchen also features two islands and one "peninsula" (joined to a wall at one end). A roll-up tambour door between the refrigerator and oven conceals storage shelves and small appliances to keep

the image clean. A pantry space just off the garage helps to avoid clutter in the kitchen.

computer-controlled lighting

"Lighting, as well as furniture, provides the 'walls' of this house, defining its spaces and functions," says Krumholz. With their sophisticated lighting plan, the owners distinguished between "ambient" and "task" lighting and incorporated both throughout. All lighting fixtures are linked to a computer-controlled switching system with pre-set mood levels, such as the "television watching mode" or the "entertaining friends mode."

The exterior of the house is faced in synthetic stucco with steel rods supporting the overhanging metal roof to emphasize the industrial motif on the outside. A teak deck with a steel railing overlooks the wooded backyard. The architects credit Corso Brothers with doing a beautiful job on the construction of this home, recognizing that the precision and detailing made this a challenging project.

As high-tech as this house may appear, it's not technologically complicated. Craig Slater, SRK's project architect for the house, says, "We've designed other houses for owners who asked for sophisticated technology, and then couldn't figure out how to operate it. This house is very user-friendly."

Bridget McQuate is a Philadelphia freelance writer and the editor of The Philadelphia Architect, the monthly newspaper of the American Institute of Architects, Philadelphia Chapter.



A breakfast bar, two islands and a peninsula provide plenty of workspace in the enormous kitchen (top). Lighting accents shine up through the glass surface of the breakfast bar.