

Architect's Brag Book

PAUL MACHT

Swiss Chalet tumbles down a Chester County hill

BY BRIDGET MCQUATE

PHOTOS BY TOM BERNARD



The retired couples' original vision: A grandiose French chateau. The end result: A unique living experience in a softer, hybrid "Chester County Swiss chalet" better suited to the rolling hills of Pennsylvania than the Alps. This expansive home, built on several sloping acres of forested land, is the perfect fusion of architect Paul Macht's individual style and the homeowners' dreams.

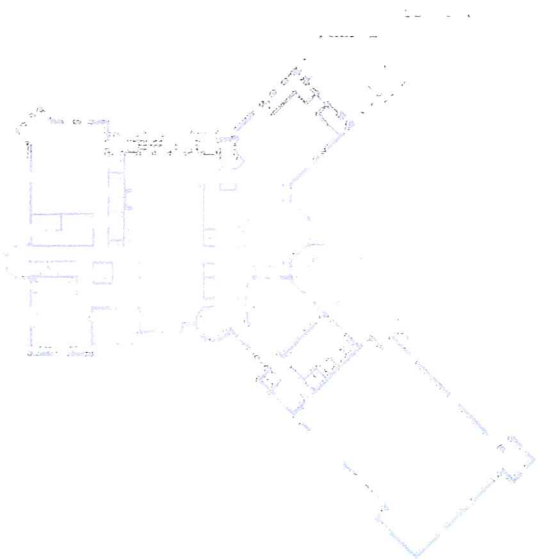
Macht's chalet touches are seen in turrets popping out of the roof, cedar-shake shingles and overhangs, numerous balconies, little red roofs here and there, and a pergola above an outside dining terrace. The house tumbles down a hill, mountain-style, making it a product of its setting.



The chalet is custom-designed to suit the rolling hills of Pennsylvania, rather than the Swiss Alps.



Seen from the front, the home invites the outdoors in through numerous windows of varying sizes and shapes. The floorplan of this sprawling home was designed for easy flow throughout the main living areas.



Windows in every possible size and dimension punctuate the designs, inside and out. Windows are even placed in interior rooms to let the sun penetrate deeply into the house. Imaginative use of windows — one of Paul Macht's hallmarks — is an aesthetic as well as a practical device. As decorative items, Macht says, "windows are one of the strongest elements of the palette and can replace a lot of expensive ornamentation on the interior." And, he says, as the "eyes" of the house, windows help maintain a close connection to the landscape during the long indoor months.

Intimacy from openness and connection

The living room rises up 2½ floors and is ringed by a second-floor balcony, which overlooks the space. An outdoor balcony offers views to the living room inside and the rolling hills outside. The kitchen, dining room and living room all flow into each other. Macht says this is a trend in custom houses.

"People who design their own homes tend not to want separate rooms for these spaces anymore. The kitchen and dining areas are important social centers and should be made more available to the main living area." In this house, the openness and connection between rooms provides a sense of intimacy that is rare in such a sprawling home. The home also features an elevator — a luxury item now, but a possible necessity in the future.

The pool house sits at the back, connected to two tiny storage huts with matching, miniature shingled roofs. In the summer, the indoor pool can be turned into an outdoor pool by opening the accordion-style glass doors on both sides. For visiting grandchildren, sleeping quarters, a recreation room and a game room are located on the lower level near the pool.

Inexpensive to build and built to last

Another trademark of Macht's style is his desire to be environmentally responsible through "tightness" in the building process. "The insulated concrete basement wall panels and rigid insulated wall panels above allow this house to be super tight," he says. By preventing any leakage of air from the outside, he can dramatically downsize the heating system. Electrical outlets designed to prevent air seepage around the seams were installed to tighten things up even more.

Fresh air is brought in with a heat exchanger system. "In the middle of winter, the system brings in fresh, cold, outside air that takes on the heat of the air being exhausted from inside of the house. The reverse happens in the summer," Macht explains. It was the clients' own desire to build "green" that originally led them to Macht and Entekin Builders, which built the home according to Macht's design.

The house, although quite large, was relatively inexpensive to build, despite the environmentally responsible design. The extra insulation and the heat exchanger system, will pay for themselves in energy savings in four to five years. The stone base of the house is veneer stone facade instead of more expensive blocks. The cedar shingles on the roof were not cheap, but will last a long time. Many of the interior walls are dry wall with a thin coat of gypsum, which is less expensive than plaster and adds a soft, stucco-like texture. The flat, stained-wood trim costs less than more-ornamental decoration. The windows are insulated with argon but have no added "muntins or mullions" (window bars or joints). It saves money to build that way and, as Paul Macht says, "it lets the window be what it wants to be."

Macht isn't implying that the house designed itself, but when you take your cues from nature, some things just fall into place.

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A second-floor balcony overlooks the 2¹/₂-story living room. The kitchen integrates smoothly with the dining room and living room