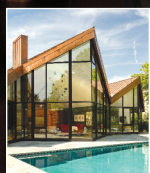


SUMMER 2018
FREE

ARCHITECTURE **DC**

Welcome Home

The Annual Residential Design Issue



Inside:

The Gables Have Been Turned
Kitchen Renovation Transforms a 1940s House
Penthouse Apartment Frames Stunning Views
Short-Term Housing Project Defies Stereotypes

Close-up of the Sculpture Studio, with the main house in the right background.

Triumphal Arc

Curve Lends
Distinctive Profile
to Art Studio

by Steven K. Dickens, AIA, LEED AP

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Sculpture Studio, showing the graceful arc of the roof.



Project: Sculpture Studio,
Washington, DC

Architects: **Checa Architects**
Lighting Consultants: **Code Lumen**
Landscape Designers: **Backyard Bounty**
in collaboration with the owner and the architect.
Landscape Installation: **Shorb Landscaping**
Structural Engineers: **JGK Structural Engineers**
MEP Engineers: **MEPtech**
Specialty Metal Work: **Salvaging Creativity**
Contractor: **Klockner & Company**

Architect **Lorena Checa, AIA, LEED AP**, of **Checa Architects PC**, has done many custom residential projects in the Washington area, ranging from a single bathroom (albeit a large and luxurious one) to new houses. The Sculpture Studio, in the Chevy Chase neighborhood of DC, is the third project Checa has overseen for a couple whom she has known for a quarter-century. First it was the basement renovation; then the living areas and garden at the south side of the house plus upstairs bedrooms; and now, the master suite, garden, and studio/garage at the north side of the site.

Around 2012, the wife in the client couple started creating art. This interest and talent blossomed, and, wanting to keep it closer to home, the couple decided in 2013 to build an addition on the underutilized northern side yard, bordering the alley. (The house is on a corner, with an alley on the third side, and positioned such that it barely has a “back yard,” leaving two side yards for private outdoor space.) Studying the situation, Checa suggested an outbuilding, in no small part to create a courtyard space between the new structure and the main house that would be comfortably shady when the south side yard is too hot. Eventually the scope



Interior of the Sculpture Studio.

expanded to include the adjacent portion of the house, which had not been part of previous renovations.

From a zoning standpoint, Checa decided to treat the studio as an “accessory building.” The catch was that art studios are not directly allowed as accessory buildings under the law, but garages are, and a garage could, in turn, legally house a studio. So, technically, the studio was permitted as a garage, and it can function as such, although it certainly would be an unusually bright and elegant space for automobile storage. (With the 2016 revision to the DC zoning code, the worst of this confusion has been ironed out, but regulations for accessory buildings are still complicated.)

The precise location and footprint of the studio were not determined by whim, but by careful analysis of zoning limitations, including height, percentage of lot occupancy, distance to the alley, width of the “court” created between the studio and the existing house, and so on. In contrast, the architectural form of the curving roof came from “artistic inspiration,” said Checa. “When I was younger, I was once a dancer, and now as an architect, I feel how things should *move*,” she added. The studio wanted movement, and the curved roof delivers.

The curve gives a sense of welcome at its high, front side, but slopes back to reduce its visual impact on the neighboring house.

High windows provide tantalizing views in and out, especially as the owner’s sculptures increasingly populate a broad interior shelf at the window sill line. The curve is different than the gable form standard to the neighborhood, but it is a friendly departure—the difference seems charming, not jarring. The studio and adjacent gravel driveway, enclosed by a custom metal-and-wood fence of Checa’s design, were intended to work for occasional displays of art. This has happened twice so far, once for the artist’s metal works, and once for works by the clients’ son, who attends the Savannah College of Art and Design.

In addition to the roof, the big COR-TEN (self-weathering) steel doors and side panels, fabricated by Salvaging Creativity of York, Pennsylvania (“check out their incredible website,” Checa urges), mark this as a special place devoted to metal. Slots are cut out of the side panels, with LED strip lights at the top—a simple detail. “In my work, I strive to open each of us to our spirit essence,” said Checa, citing the character of the side panels, which evokes “the candles in a church altar, or stars in the sky. Even people who don’t believe in anything can be moved by art and architecture.”

With its graceful curving roof, warm-toned material palette, and modest scale, the Metal Art Studio fits comfortably in its domestic environment, while adding a distinct spark to the neighborhood. 🏠



New courtyard between the Sculpture Studio at right and the main house.