



forever home

A design team conjures a welcoming retreat
on the Wye River for builder Guy Pilli

Text by Michele Lerner | Photography by David Burroughs

Previous spread: The great room features a wood-paneled ceiling, a stone fireplace and a wall of Marvin windows overlooking the river. With its pitched roofs and mix of siding from Nichiha and NuCedar, a rear view of the home evokes classic Shingle style. Diamond-paned and eyebrow windows embellish the front façade (below). Designed by Joni Zimmerman, the kitchen (right) is outfitted with Paradiso granite counters, Signature white-painted cabinetry and a hickory island.



After 40 years of building custom homes, Guy Pilli knows what he wants—and so do his friends. “This is the fourth house I’ve built for myself, and it will be my final house,” he says. “I knew I wanted this to be a ‘just right’ house that’s not too big and not too small.”

The new three-bedroom, four-and-a-half bath abode he shares with wife Terri graces a private, seven-acre waterfront lot on the Wye River near Queenstown, Maryland. Completed in 2019, the 3,500-square-foot residence was a collaborative effort spearheaded by Pilli; Cathy Purple Cherry, founding principal of Purple Cherry Architects; and Kevin Campion, principal of Campion Hruby Landscape Architects—all long-time friends.

The trio started out by carefully surveying the site. “It was amazing to watch Guy and Cathy walk the property and find the perfect angle and view for every room in the house when there was nothing there,” recalls Terri Pilli, a nurse.

Architecture & Interior Design: Cathy Purple Cherry, AIA, CAS, LEED AP, principal; Ashley Babaian, associate; Annie Kersey, interior designer, Purple Cherry Architects, Annapolis, Maryland. Kitchen Design: Joni Zimmerman, CKD, CBD, Design Solutions Inc., Annapolis, Maryland. Builder: Guy Pilli, Pilli Custom Homes, Millersville, Maryland. Landscape Architecture: Kevin Campion, ASLA, principal; Nick Ries, senior associate, Campion Hruby Landscape Architects, Annapolis, Maryland.

“The house is purposely long to extend views along the shoreline.” —GUY PILLI



The backyard offers multiple spaces for indoor-outdoor living, including a porch outside the primary suite on the left, a deck off the breakfast area, a screened porch, a pool terrace and a fire pit.

Inspired by Eastern Shore Shingle-style architecture, Cherry and associate Ashley Babaian designed the home with steeply pitched rooflines. Diamond-shaped window panes, an eyebrow dormer on the front and arched windows on the rear lend character. The front façade, which presents a more traditional look, is designed for privacy, while the back boasts wide expanses of glass to avoid chopping up water views.

"The house is purposely long to extend views along the shoreline," Guy says. "The swooped roofline and dormer windows are Cathy's signature elements; Terri and I love them."

The home is sited on a peninsula 140 feet from the river's edge. Purple Cherry's plan created open sight lines from the foyer through the great room to the river. The dining room is in the front of the home while the kitchen, great room and first-floor owners' suite line the back. The Pillis' bedroom enjoys an expansive, 270-degree water vista. Upstairs, along with a loft sitting area and a playroom, two en-suite guest bedrooms host visiting children and grandchildren.

To maintain unobstructed water views, a screened porch was placed off the side of the kitchen rather than behind the home. "Typically, a porch is off the main living area to double your entertainment space," explains Cherry. "Guy wanted a 'destination porch' like they had in their old house, which is separate from the other living areas."

Although Terri "test drove" the excavator to make the first scoop during the ground-breaking, she left building decisions to the experienced team. "My favorite space is the great room," she enthuses. "It looks like a house in Aspen with its vaulted wood ceiling and the huge stones on the fireplace." The stones are reclaimed-granite curb cuts that the couple found at a local stone supplier.

Meanwhile, Guy deferred to Terri on most interior design choices. "Our house is a mix of rustic and feminine features," she explains. At her clients' request, Annie Kersey, an interior designer with Purple Cherry Architects who helped decorate the home, sought out simple, neutral furnishings over ornate or patterned pieces that might take away from the setting. Accents in blue, Terri's favorite color, complement rather than compete with the scenery.

The Pillis frequently host friends in the great room, kitchen and dining room, which spills out onto a deck. The kitchen sink faces the river and the kitchen island, with its rough hickory base and granite top, is big enough so the couple can cook together.

Terri relishes the peace of sitting by the pool after a hard day at the hospital. Located across the back of the house, a deck, outdoor dining area, pool terrace and fire pit are intimate spaces that foster relaxation and entertaining.

When it came to landscaping, "Guy wanted his home to blend into its natural surroundings," notes Kevin Campion. "We turned the front of the house into a wildflower meadow with native plants that are part of the Eastern Shore vernacular, require less water and only need trimming a couple of times a year." Native grasses, coneflowers and black-eyed Susans were planted to form a natural buffer along the river.

Working together, these Eastern Shore experts created a comfortable and inviting haven. "We wanted an extremely private and functional house that's both a peaceful retreat and an easy place to spend time together and with friends and family on the water," Guy reflects. "It is definitely our forever house." ↓



A cathedral ceiling in the owners' bedroom (above) accommodates abundant windows and doors that open to a private porch. The en-suite bath (opposite) sports a floor and tub surround in Carrara marble. One of the two upper-level guest rooms (below) features a custom bench in a window niche offering prime river views.

