Dwell Magazine

Architect Rick Cook Designed a Home for His Family—Then Discovered Someone Had Done It Better

A ’70s residence in upstate New York by Charles P. Winter gave Cook and his wife the perfect starting point for a sensitive 20-year renovation.

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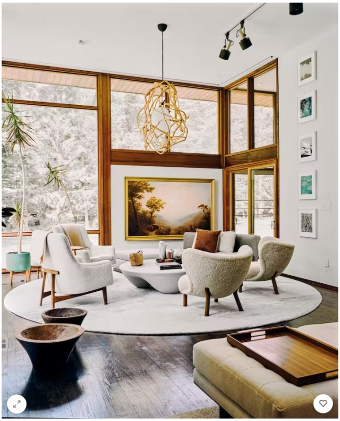
In 2000, after being urged by a friend to look at homes in Snedens Landing, a neighborhood in the hamlet of Palisades, New York, that’s filled with historic residences, architect Rick Cook and his wife, Ellen, toured a four-bedroom built in the early 1970s. The exterior wasn’t especially intriguing, but then they stepped inside. "I was like, Oh my goodness, this looks like what Rick designed," says Ellen. Rick had made a similar sketch when dreaming up his ideal home, though there were a few differences in the real building. "I really liked the way the proportions were tighter in the foyer and then opened up in the living room, where you get views of the woods," he says.

Architect Rick Cook imagined his ideal family home and then found something surprisingly similar for sale on a wooded two-acre lot in Palisades, New York.

Photo Categories: exterior, wood siding material, brick siding material, house building type, flat roofline, mid-century building type

The 4,000-square-foot residence had been designed by architect Charles P. Winter, whose homes can be found across Rockland County. They typically have one dominant view of the Hudson River, but this one, a three-level glass-and-wood box, captured multiple views of the sky and surrounding woods. "Given our fascination with architects like Andrew Geller and Horace Gifford, we saw Charlie in this context of important architects who never had the fame of the New York Five," says Rick, referring to the group of ’70s modernist designers.

Rick and Ellen bought the house from the family that commissioned it. Shortly after, they adopted twin baby boys and began making updates to the decades-old home—but not without some guidance. "Charlie was still alive when we bought the house, and he came and met us, which was very cool," says Rick. "I wanted to hear what he was trying to accomplish, and we tried to stay consistent with that."



In the living room, soft-hued seating arranged in a circle is perfect for entertaining. On the far wall, Sunrise Over the Hudson, by Erik Koeppel, competes with the stunning scenery outside. "Charlie was interested in skewered views, like looking straight up at the sky and then out to the woods," says Rick.

Photo: Francois Dischinger

Photo Categories: living room, dark hardwood floors, end tables, coffee tables, sofa, pendant lighting, bench, chair, rug floors

A brick hearth designed by Winter was updated with a gas fireplace.

Photo Categories: living room, ceiling lighting, sectional, sofa, floor lighting, rug floors, end tables, dark hardwood floors, wood burning fireplace, standard layout fireplace, storage, lamps, chair, ottomans, pendant lighting

Photo Categories: dining room, table, lamps, storage, dark hardwood floors, pendant lighting, chair, table lighting, ceiling lighting, rug floors, track lighting

The central stair landing doubles as a music room. "In many ways this is the center of our home," says Rick. "The entire house literally circles it." Hanging on the wall is a 16th-century Tyrolean wood figure of Christ purchased from the original owners.

Photo Categories: staircase, wood tread, wood railing

Photo Categories: dining room, chair, bench, pendant lighting, dark hardwood floors, table

The original plan remains. The foyer provides a glimpse of soaring ceilings punched with skylights and leads to the living room, a box of light with a patchwork of oversize windows. On one side is a nook where Rick updated a brick hearth with a gas fireplace insert, and on another is a double-height covered porch. Up a set of stairs from the nook is the dining room, which shares the second level with the kitchen and a family room. The third level holds the primary suite with a porch, the kids' bedrooms, and a gym/meditation room.

Rick, one of the founders of Cookfox Architects, has faced his share of challenges, having designed dozens of projects, including the Bank of America Tower in Manhattan and Brooklyn's City Point, a mixed-used development. But nothing was more daunting than renovating his own home, he says. "It's very easy to make decisions for other people, but making decisions for yourself and your family—that was really unique."

The couple redid the kitchen without enlarging it, in an effort to stay true to Winter's plan. "We were trying to do a modern version of what would feel right in a house designed in the '70s," explains Rick.

Photo Categories: kitchen, drop in sinks, ceiling lighting, white cabinets, wall oven

Photo Categories: outdoor, wood patio, porch, deck, decking patio, porch, deck

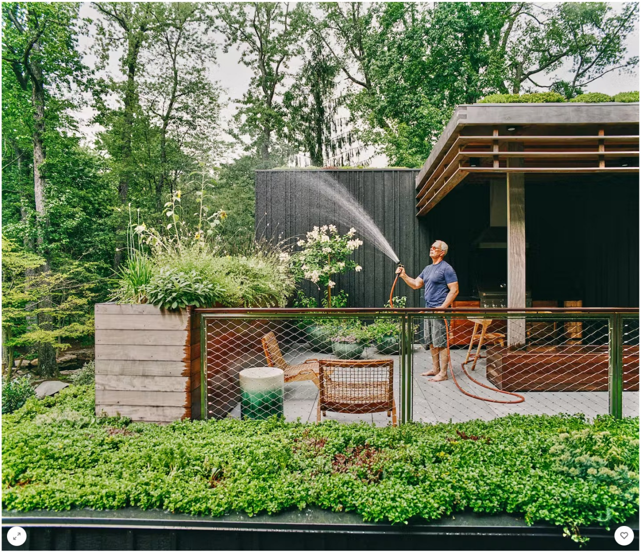
Photo Categories: bath room, freestanding tubs, subway tile walls, pendant lighting, ceramic tile walls

Photo Categories: bedroom, night stands, bed, pendant lighting, carpet floors, ceiling lighting

Photo Categories: living room, track lighting, dark hardwood floors, sofa, sectional, rug floors

> **"Most people make these giant family room kitchens, but we chose to redesign ours in the same square footage as before."**
>
> **—Rick Cook, renovation architect and**

resident



A 580-square-foot terrace complete with outdoor kitchen sits above a new garage. The terrace's design was inspired in part by New York's High Line, says Rick, with its varied and immersive plantings, expanded steel-mesh guardrail, and lighting beneath ipe handrail caps.

Photo Categories: outdoor, gardens, raised planters, large patio, porch, deck, side yard, woodland, flowers, trees, back yard, concrete patio, porch, deck, shrubs

The kitchen was especially trying. "We probably went through, without exaggeration, one hundred different layouts," says Rick. "But because Charlie believed kitchens should be modest and didn't like a lot of cabinets, we kept that basic concept." The family stuck with the original pantry but added new appliances and open shelving and created a breakfast nook. The most significant change is the addition of an elevated garden terrace with an outdoor kitchen above an enclosed garage. Connected to the home's second level by a short bridge, it was designed by Rick with references to Manhattan's High Line.

Although he and Ellen had ideas for their dream home even before purchasing the Winter residence, creating one still took 20 years. But in their minds, hurrying along the process became less important once they were committed to honoring Winter's vision. "That's the thing with renovating an architect's house," says Rick. "I would rather have it unfinished than done poorly."

HURLEY
MOTORSPORTS

Rick and his wife, Ellen, are experienced auto racers and collect classic cars, like their 1969 Chevrolet Camaro Z11.

Photo Categories: living room, rug floors, ottomans, end tables, sofa

Photo Categories: garage, attached garage room type

Cost, indecision, and the scale of the project, which included the original 4,000-square-foot home and a sizable addition, all slowed the pace of the renovation, but so did the couple's desire to honor the intent of the original architect, Charles P. Winter, who designed the house in 1972. "It made me think about every move we made," says Rick.

Photo Categories: exterior, mid-century building type, wood siding material, flat roofline, house building type

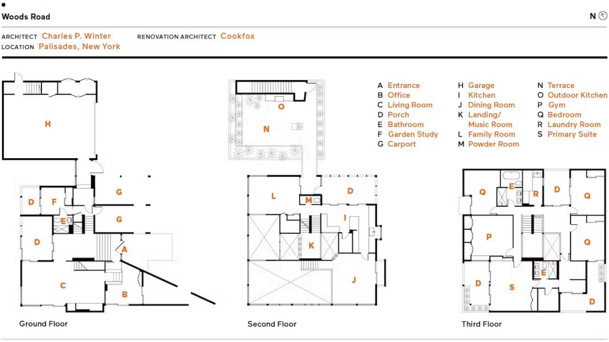


Illustration by Lohnes + Wright

Project Credits:

Architect of Record: Cookfox Architects

Structural engineering: WSP

Landscape installation: Heyhoe Garden Design and Summerhill

Lighting: Ketra

Interior venetian plaster: Pietra Viva

Roofing: Kemper System

Automated window shades and lighting control system: Lutron

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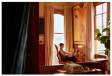

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