



Architecture: Studio Dumitru

meaning that the finished walkout basement does not encroach on the minimum flood hazard zone. The project itself was strongly influenced by the fact that it is directly on the water. We were able to successfully develop a plan that created a very linear house, offering the client direct access to the entirety of the property's assets. The views to the east and southeast are very pleasant from all floors of the house. The rock outcroppings enabled us to nestle the house into these ledges and let them bleed into the base of the house to allow a strong visual footing from the water side. We were able to incorporate some amazing outdoor living spaces directly off the basement and first-floor levels.

As part of the approval process, both FEMA and local regulations required us to work with indigenous plantings and screening, which we were careful to develop. Ultimately, the client was able to seek approval for the dock, which gives them direct access to the waterfront community.

**Michael Smith**  
**Michael Smith Architects**

For us this means taking what the site gives you, so to speak. This may mean using the stone excavated from the site for the house walls—or other natural site features. It could also mean taking an inventory of the existing specimen trees and plantings and work-

ing around them, or reusing them in the final design and siting the house to engage with the land and topography and not fight it.

**D+D:** The market offers a variety of styles and colors in all construction materials, making it difficult to choose a single option. How do you create a multitude of shapes—and what materials do you use? Please give us some suggestions on how to properly combine different materials, such as wood and tile flooring.

**Laura Casale**  
**Laura Casale Architect**

Too many options out there are confusing people. As an architect, I always start with the performance quality for each material, as that immediately narrows down choices.

Education is an important part of my career, whether it be in my communication with clients on building their dream home, or classes I've taught at New York Institute of Technology and Parsons School of Design. To break down the materials in a project, it is helpful to organize by category, for example: roofing materials, siding material, window material. Within that, there may be multiple materials.

Performance is one of the first characteristics of a material to con-



Architecture: Laura Casale Architect

sider. One might be tempted to overlook it, but it can make or break a project. There's a reason why you don't see cedar roofs in Charleston: the humidity would not allow for it. It is critical to understand each material's performance and how they interact with one another. All my projects have quality builders to ensure proper installation and integration of materials.

Once the materials are selected based on performance, the architectural style of the home should be considered. A center hall colonial will have clapboard and a cedar shake roof; a Tudor home would combine brick, stone, timber, slate; a more modern structure might have a clean polished stucco and planking.

Laura Casale Architect works in all these styles, but we are best known for our historic renovations. The renovation pictured here illustrates the importance of material in architecture. To the right of the front door is the original brick, which is 96 years older than the brick on the left. We meticulously sourced the brick from the original manufacturer and had the mortar custom dyed. The result is a renovation that seamlessly integrates the new and the old.

**D+D:** There is a lot of buzz about the "curvy custom home." What does this mean to you in your design?

**Laura Casale:** Who doesn't adore an oval room! The curvy home is something I think we all naturally crave, and although it may be trendy, it also has historic references. For my recent vignette at "Rooms with a View," I created a space called the "New Art Nouveau Boudoir," which was inspired by turn-of-the-century design icons like William Morris and Victor Horta. It was a joy to create custom architectural details that inspire and bring depth to a room. Details matter, and nothing transforms a space



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Architecture: West Chin Architects + Interiors Designers

like intricate, curvaceous architectural elements. This is what brings depth and warmth into a home and creates that inviting, custom experience.

**D+D:** How do you approach design features that mesh with the geography and ecology of the site?

**Laura Casale:** Nature inspires my design, and I like to bring the outside in. In our architectural plans, we establish the views to the exterior and utilize those vistas to make the house feel larger.

Beyond designing to maximize views, I like to



Architecture: West Chin Architects + Interiors Designers



Architecture: Peter Cadoux Architects

create an integrative experience that encourages indoor/outdoor living. For example, I love to design kitchens with a surrounding patio and adjacent herb garden. This is something I have in my own home, and it brings me immeasurable joy. There is something so fantastic about picking live herbs from your own garden; I even do it in January! It is so much more rewarding than spending money on dead herbs from the supermarket.

**D+D:** How many functions should be considered for a multi-functional room?

**Laura Casale:** I am a big believer that all rooms should be multi-

functional, and I will assign two to three functions to each room, depending on the client's lifestyle. It is especially important that rooms that are not used often be designed for multiple functions. A guest bedroom, for example, should not only be used for the handful of times that one has guests. I prefer to use that valuable real estate to elevate living year-round. A guest room also makes for a cozy den where you can watch TV. I will design space for a sofa to accommodate that function. There are so many other guest room possibilities as well, including an art studio and an office space. It is important to think about these functions when designing the home. I am a firm believer that you should not have dead space in your house.



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The dining room is another space that lends itself to multifunction, especially if you don't use it for everyday dining. So many of us use the dining room as a workspace, whether it be for after-school homework or Zoom meetings. With that in mind, I design dining rooms with ample storage that hides everything. Beautiful built-ins in the dining room can subtly house office clutter, so it's easy to keep the space looking beautiful and ready for entertaining dinner guest.

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George Dumitru  
Studio Dumitru

As we all know, in the past few years we have witnessed an explosion of new products in the construction industry: new materials, new colors and, most interesting, variations of old ones. Manufacturers have been busy trying to capture the markets. Some have been successful, some have not.

This infusion of new products has made ever so more important

the presence of a professional. Clients need someone with knowledge to navigate the sea of products, a lot of which are not up to the quality required for the industry. Most of them look very good on paper, but not so good in real life. This says a lot about the power of social media, which bombards us with a new product every day.

We try in our office to be at the forefront of the subject, however, without falling prey to trends. That also comes down to implementation. Some of these new products function great in conjunction with others, but not so great with all of them. Combining them and finding the proper harmony comes down to the design professional and his aptitude to do so. In the end, the design has to pass both the test of time and, most important, the test of elegance.

#### Resources

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