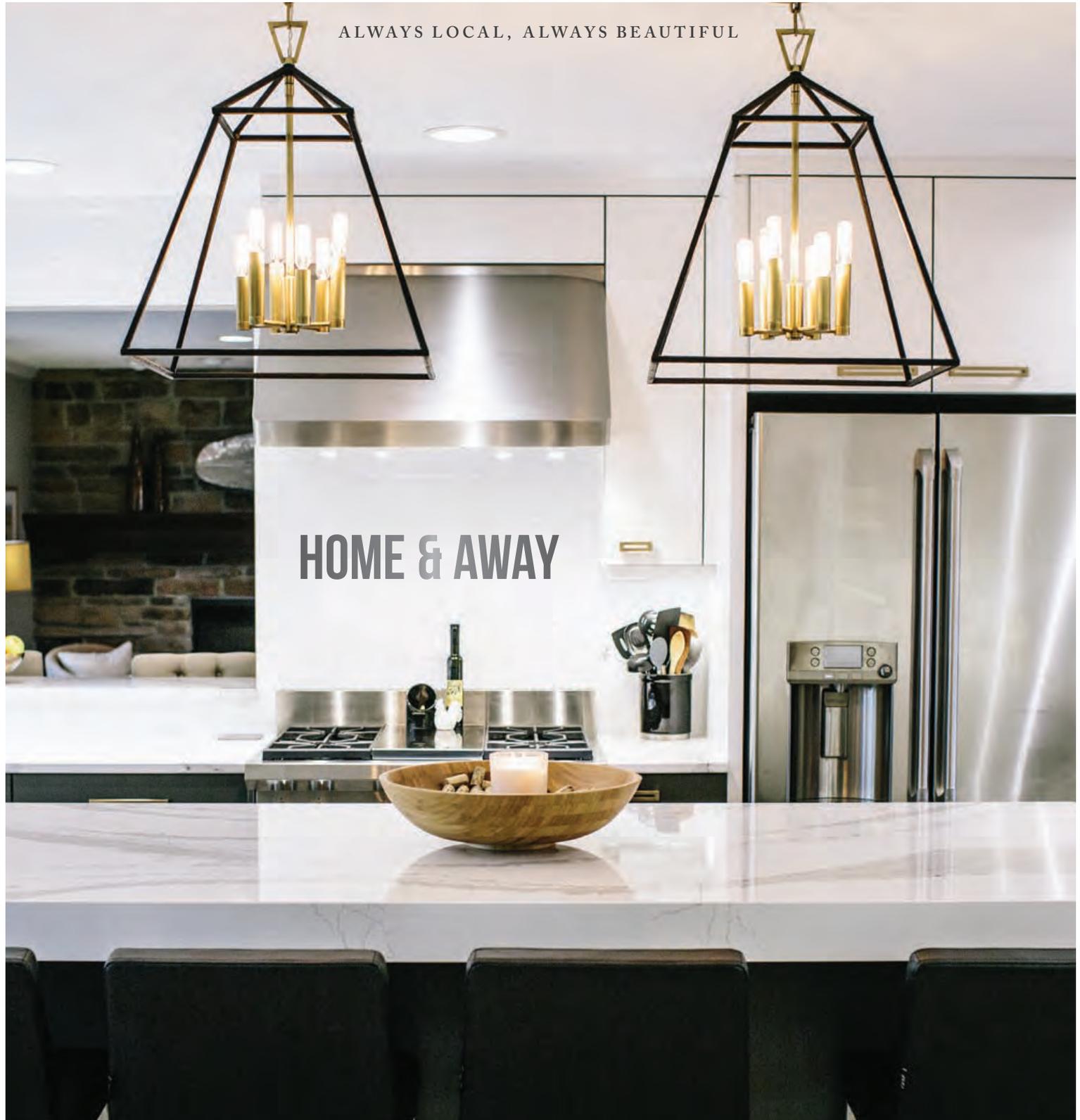


mahaHome

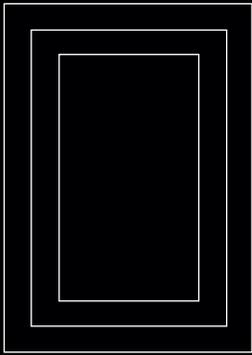
JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2018

ALWAYS LOCAL, ALWAYS BEAUTIFUL

HOME & AWAY



LOCAL DESIGNERS' FAVORITE ROOMS // ARCHITECT PAUL ERIK NELSON'S HOME OFFICE // THE GRAND REVEAL OF A YEARLONG RENOVATION



PAUL ERIK NELSON'S HOME OFFICE

Art Moderne Abode
in District 66

In the historic Loveland Park neighborhood, quietly nestled away along a tree-lined street, there is a home and homeowner with an uncanny fervor for contemporary style and historic authenticity.

Perched atop a grassy lawn, architect Paul Erik Nelson's 4,400-square-foot residence stands regal with worthy bones updated with deliberate modifications. Nelson, who is the sole partner of PEN Architects—a firm known for both restorations and new builds—took this home as an architectural project and space for his growing family. ▶





◀ Built in 1937, the home was designed by Reinholdt Frederick Hennig in an art moderne style (sometimes called “streamline modern”), which is essentially a refined version of art deco. In line with this architectural style, the home features curvilinear elements inside, such as the stairs, as well as rounded corners around the windows.

Through researching the home, its historic neighborhood, and the original architect in preparation for renovations, Nelson learned that his home has several other companions built with the Farronwall technique before World War II in Nebraska. He explains that the Farronwall technique involves brick masonry that provides a formwork for pouring concrete floors. A hollow space between the massive walls helps to ventilate the house.

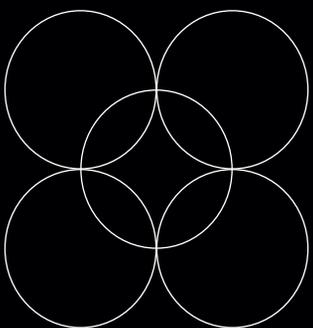
Farronwall construction methods were low-cost, and the structures are known for their unique bombproof sturdiness. “We do feel very safe in this house,” Nelson says, “and older neighbors have told us they took shelter in it during the 1973 tornado.”

In the history of the residence, the Nelsons are the fourth owners—and the home’s exterior offers clues to its

evolution. Instead of trying to hide previous renovations, he identified them in horizontal charcoal-gray shingles that accent Hennig’s original beige square bricks. Nelson envisioned “not fighting with the original character” while keeping it light with his own renovations.

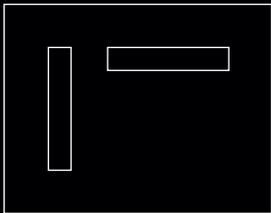
To passersby on the street, his front yard’s modern treehouse offers one of his own attention-grabbing additions to the plot of land.

“The treehouse is floating and quite transparent, which is a playful contrast to the heavier more massive feeling of the house sitting on the ground,” Nelson says. “When I built it, the idea was to reuse materials from the original house and yard to enhance its physical connection. The horizontally laid wood slats do relate to some of the linear masonry detailing on the house. We liked the look of the treehouse so much we repeated some of the same architectural elements on an upper-level addition added recently.” ▶





NELSON ENVISIONED
“NOT FIGHTING WITH THE
ORIGINAL CHARACTER”
WHILE KEEPING IT LIGHT
WITH HIS OWN RENOVATIONS.



◀ After purchasing the home, Nelson began removing years of ad hoc additives to reveal Henning's original detailing and intent. "I could tell there was something special hidden," he says.

Peeling back the layers of the home's history and functionality, he reorganized the space with warm wood floors, a new centralized kitchen, eclectic accents, and even turned a former garage into a family room. Some original details—including a rounded staircase off the entry foyer and calico fireplace—remain as a nod to the past. Nelson also opened up the second-floor master bathroom, adding large windows and tub that look out onto a lush back and side yard. This updated space includes protruding windows that double as display areas for personal items. It is through these calculated updates and personal touches that the Nelson family is transforming their 80-year-old home to work for their contemporary needs.

His sense of searching for the bones of a place and proposing tactical updates are also what Nelson pursues in his architecture practice. His office, conveniently located above the garage, is a light-drenched space with rolls of construction documents and balsa wood models neatly organized throughout. Two large iMac screens sit on an elongated desk scattered with notes, family mementos, and design periodicals.

Nelson started PEN in 2011 as a one-man-shop specializing in both commercial and residential architecture. To date, he has completed more than 40 architectural and historic preservation projects. For some of his work prior to establishing PEN, Nelson won an American Institute of Architects award for his work on the Joy Residence, Salhany Residence, and Whitcomb Conservatory on the campus of Doane College.

His approach to design allows each project to develop without a preconceived notion or style. What emerges, like his residence, is a studied product derived from an authentic process where appropriate additives coalesce alongside historic preservation—synchronicity at its best. OmahaHome

Visit penarchitect.com for more information about Paul Erik Nelson's architectural work.

