



Louisville artist David Schuster was commissioned to create the painting above the fireplace in the living room.

# BACK TO THE FUTURE

Amy Cimba of Bittners leads a forward-thinking update of a rural mid-century masterpiece

*Written by Bridget Williams / Photography by Andrew Kung*

Good design transcends time. Case in point is this “rustic modern” home, built in 1967, and thoughtfully restored by its current owners. With its soaring ceilings and walls of windows that showcase outdoor living spaces and views for miles, the residence appears to have been plucked from a hillside above Malibu and positioned prominently atop a ridge in rural Central Kentucky. Located on the remnants of a 3,000-acre farm settled in the late 1700s, the home is now part of a 1,000-acre parcel assembled by the current owners, and utilized as both a working farm and a family retreat.

The term “mid-century modern” was coined by author Cara Greenberg for her 1984 book *Mid-Century Modern: Furniture of the 1950s*. The publication signaled a resurgence of interest in the architectural and interior design style, which continues to endure today, fueled by a combination of nostalgia and a current inclination to eschew excess in favor of simplicity.

Built to commercial-grade standards, the home presents a commanding presence, with rooms that vary in scale and volume; a big departure from the style of the homeowners’ primary residence. At the heart of the home is a dramatic wooden staircase with a v-shaped steel crutch supporting the landing. “It’s an architectural marvel,” remarked interior designer Amy Cimba, Vice President of Residential Design at Bittners. Cimba, along with builder Aaron Esposito, were tasked with directing a renovation that took into account the historical significance of the architecture but didn’t treat it like a static museum piece. “We worked hard to be thoughtful about any additions, but we certainly weren’t forced to be purists,” explained Cimba, who added that functionality and family-friendliness were paramount throughout the process.



Minimal alterations were made to the original kitchen.



A casual dining area adjacent to the kitchen overlooks the rolling hills that surround the property.



Original wood paneling in the master bedroom was painted a soft white to create a more restful environment.



The tile floor, painted cork wallpaper and pendant lights in the hallway are all original design elements.

Carried out in phases, the renovation proceeded slowly at first and then quickly picked up steam as the homeowners grew to embrace the home's unique style. Cimba gave a generous nod to mod in nearly all of the rooms, but she also purposefully sprinkled in tribal motifs and more rustic elements, which are a reflection of the rural Kentucky setting, and serve to keep the home from looking like a *Mad Men* set.

Throughout the home, attributes of mid-century style, namely elements that are void of excessive ornamentation so that their function becomes the star, permit a greater appreciation of the architecture as well as the craftsmanship of the pieces that furnish each room. In the soaring-ceilinged entryway, the Espanola terracotta tiled floor, hand-painted cork wallpaper,

and hexagon-shaped lanterns that illuminate a long hallway are all original design elements. With an abundance of graphic statements already present in the built environment, Cimba took great care with her choices of art and furniture, opting for impactful pieces capable of playing strong supporting roles.

Moving through the foyer, the home splits off into two wings, with an indoor pool and master suite accessed to the left, and a library/bar, living and dining rooms and kitchen to the right. A stacked stone fireplace added to the master suite drew its inspiration from stone accent walls in the entry and the living room. The original wood paneling was painted a soft white to both contemporize the space and create a more restful environment.



Custom-made bunk rooms—one outfitted for boys and the other for girls—are located in the lower level.





A v-shaped crutch supports the dramatic main staircase.



Original architectural elements are complemented by mid-century inspired furnishings in the library/bar.



Custom cabinetry provides sleek storage in the lower level media room.



A glass wall installed in the wine cellar to the right of the bar allows one to peek at the treasures inside.

With a plethora of sleek retro-inspired seating, and original dark wood paneling and vaulted ceiling with exposed wood beams intact, the “Rat Pack” would have been right at home in the chic library/bar. Onyx wall sconces and Versailles Mesh glass tiles from Ann Sacks behind the bar’s copper-clad shelving adds just the right amount of seduction without being overly dramatic. An iconic Nogouchi table is positioned in the center of a tribalesque geometric-print rug; the shaggy texture of the latter serves as a fitting foil to the tiled floors and predominance of linearity.

Grandly proportioned, the living room also retains its original paneling and exposed beam ceiling, along with a projector room, a state-of-the-art amenity at the time the home was constructed (a painting conceals an opening in the wall where the equipment would have been). Prominently displayed above the fireplace, a photograph of an 80-acre lake on property

served as the inspiration for an ethereal landscape painting by David Schuster. For this room, Cimba combined cushy sofas with more streamlined pieces, such as an Arco floor lamp, one of the most recognizable light fixtures from the 1960s.

Retaining the original floorplan, large-format terrazzo floor tiles and stainless-steel countertops in the kitchen, Cimba updated the space with a new island and a geometric tile backsplash. “It was extremely dark, so we modernized what was already there,” she said.

Capitalizing on the dual-wing floorplan, the lower level allows for children and more grownup guests to occupy separate sides of the lower level; a media room at the base of stairs provides ample space for everyone to meet in the middle. A pair of bedrooms with custom-made bunkbeds—one outfitted for girls and the other for boys—provides plenty of room for raucous sleepovers.

Reclaimed wood plays a prominent role in the design of the two-room guest suite in the lower level.



A newly added stone terrace boasts a fire pit and an outdoor kitchen.



With less architectural restraints to contend with, the homeowners were free to add a plethora of rustic elements in the two-room lower level guest suite, including accent walls clad in reclaimed wood from Longwood Antique Wood. In the sitting room, a leather sleeper sofa is both pretty and practical, as is the vinyl wood plank flooring. Caseloads chosen for these rooms follow the same vein as those found upstairs; it is quite simple to glean the era of inspiration from their clean and contemporary lines.

Complementing the mid-century architectural ethos of bringing the outdoors in, the homeowners expanded the

livable spaces outside by adding an expansive terrace with a fire pit and grilling area. Complementing the muted hues of the bluestone patio tiles, the oyster finish of the resin wicker seating allows the colors of the verdant rolling landscape to take center stage.

A half-century has passed since this unique home—even more atypical given its scale in this rural setting—was constructed. Revived under Cimba's tutelage, this family retreat continues to feel fresh and modern, underscoring the notion that simplicity and good taste in design can transcend a singular era. [37](#)