

High on Style



low on cost

by
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You'd swear that Franz and Susan Pielmeier paid a premium for the striking one-of-a-kind home they built recently in Connecticut, but they got by for \$90 per square foot—little more than the cost of a bare-bones tract house. Working with an architect who knows how to cut corners without stinting on style, the Pielmeiers gained a 2,400-square-foot showplace, complete with ample romping room for daughters Katherine and Madeline and a separate suite for Franz's mother, Paula.

PHOTOGRAPHS: JOHN KANE. ARCHITECT: DUO DICKINSON

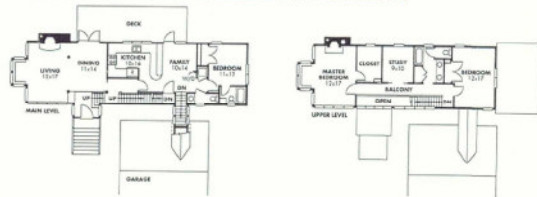
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A large fireplace in the front room anchors the flowing spaces with boldly sculptural forms that provide the perfect foil for the room's simple, clean-lined furnishings. Wood columns flanking the hearth mark those that divide the living and dining areas. Also included on the main floor are a service stairway, and a separate suite for Franz's mother.

The Pielmeiers' house perches on a narrow, side-sloping lot in a historic district that's subject to strict design covenants. To turn these drawbacks into advantages, architect Duo Dickinson came up with a long, lean structure that evokes the classic sparseness of an old New England meetinghouse, with high ceilings, tall windows, and elegantly simple trim. To stay within the Pielmeiers' no-nonsense budget, Dickinson "value-engineered" the design (his term for smart corner-cutting). For instance, the entire house was sized to fit standard building materials, which are generally inexpensive and easy to install. The width

High ceilings provided room to stack standard window units, creating "custom" window walls that give each room an open, airy feel. A big boy up there adds visual stretch.





Furniturelike cabinets screen the kitchen from the family room while allowing the two spaces to remain merged as one big room. The cabinets include a niche for the TV plus handy storage for tableware.



To afford solid wood cabinets with dovetailed joinery, the Palmairs chose ready-built rather than custom units. The trim is solid-bow pine (considerably cheaper than clear pine). In the kitchen, it's stained dark and finished natural.

of the house (just over 17 feet) approximates a standard length for framing lumber (little waste, quick assembly), and its footprint runs parallel with the slope rather than perpendicular to it (less digging and backfill). Also, by nesting against the slope, the basement doubles as a retaining wall (lower landscaping costs), and the main floor opens to an on-grade deck on the uphill side (no railings, steps, or skirting needed). The resulting savings offset some savvy splurges, such as high ceilings, wood windows, and oak flooring.



A long transom adds elegant stature to the French doors in the dining room. They open to a broad deck that's just one step up from the lawn. Light and views also enter the dining room via tall windows in the entry tower and the living room.

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The main stairwell's Shaker-style simplicity contributed extra savings: straight-run stairs are cheaper than those that turn corners, and treads that die into side walls require less finish work than those that extend under railings.

On the upper level, the big front bay supplies a sunny sitting alcove for the master bedroom. Simple Shaker furnishings, gauzy café curtains, and a brick-lined fireplace play up the room's fresh-scrubbed New England simplicity.

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The upstairs bath takes rush-hour schedules in stride. Its twin lavatories share a wide alcove, and the toilet tucks into a private compartment.

Another side benefit of the home's long, lean axis is dramatic, space-stretching interior vistas. They begin right at the front door, where the main stairwell draws the eye upward along a rhythmic sequence of wood treads that seem to float in the shimmering light. Open railings let rooms on the first and second floors share the stairwell's high-rise drama; transoms and tall windows in the exterior wall pull in the light. At the top of the stairs, another long vista terminates in a deep, windowed bay in the front wall of the master bedroom. This bay and the one directly under it in the living room rest on angle braces (much cheaper than joggling the foundation). Like the living room, the master bedroom features a wood-burning fireplace. Both fireplaces use the same chase. So does the home's heating system. (Multiple chases boost framing and trimming costs.)

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Budget-friendly refinements give the home's simple, boxlike shape a solid, substantial feel: narrow-lap wood siding; a towerlike front entry capped by a bracketed shed roof; brick steps linking the entry and the driveway; wide trim on the outside corners

and window groupings; and divided-light windows with matching transoms. The main roof area stretches unbroken from front to back, its well-proportioned eaves accentuating the structure's sturdy character and simplicity.



a wiz at cutting corners

Seasoned architect Duo Dickinson knows how to wring extra style and livability from a tight building budget. Here's a sampling from his repertoire of wallet-friendly ideas.

- Square corners, straight walls, and symmetrical roof pitches (no hips, dormers, or other appendages) cost far less to build than complicated curves, angles, and jogs.
- A house plan that's sized to fit standard dimension lumber eliminates extra cutting and minimizes waste, and it also reduces labor costs during the framing stage.
- Contractors are a gold mine of information about smart material trade-offs and money-saving construction techniques; open up to their suggestions during the bidding process, and incorporate their ideas as the design is being tweaked and the house is taking shape.
- A tight building schedule can run up the cost. Allowing time during the construction phase for making smart course corrections may save money in the long run. 🏠

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