

Projects of Note

Architect Transforms a Long, Skinny Shell into A Feast of Light and Elegant Form

A Washington, D.C., house is alive after a decade of dormancy



Robert N. Gurney, AIA, performed small miracles of light and airiness for Mary Fitch and Ron O'Rourke when he created their residence in the historic Adams-Morgan

neighborhood of Washington, D.C. This whole-house renovation began with a shell of two brick side walls and a dirt-



floor basement, with a totally demolished back wall and interior. The architect turned it into a sleek, modern residence with a three-story, two-bedroom owner's unit above and a one-bedroom rental unit on the floor below.

The house's shotgun footprint of 63 feet long and 17 feet wide on the front—narrowing to 13 feet in the back—snugs into its urban site. The interior makes optimum use of its long, narrow space by throwing a few well-placed curves into its mostly orthogonal grid. Loft spaces near the front and the back allow light deep within the space. Interior surfaces warm mix of exposed building materials from steel to corrugated panels, add detail and interest.

The January 11 *Washington Post* Home section featured a front-page, full-color story of the Fitch/O'Rourke Residence. An added bonus to the story—in terms of public relations for the profession—was prominent mention of owner Mary Fitch's vocation: executive director of the D.C. chapter of the AIA. "Gurney reinvented every square inch of the 4,000-square-foot building, approaching the space like a three-dimensional geometry problem," reported Washington Post

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staff writer Patricia Dane Rogers. "Working within the empty, rectangular framework, he sought to offset the boxiness by dividing it up with a sequence of sweeping curves and dramatic diagonals."

The beautiful and strictly efficient design of the Fitch/O'Rourke House earned Gurney a 2001 AIA Honor Award for Interiors, which will be presented at the Institute's national convention in Denver, May 17-19. ■