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THE RUN THAT LED AN ARNOLD COUPLE HOME

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Once an awkward split level, this home has been transformed inside and out, including the landscape.

Artwork throughout the home maps their travels and history.



This once dark, segmented room now has a wall of windows opening to a deck.



When Jenna Whitney and her husband Mark were living in a congested section of Howard County, their daily escape was a specific stretch of the 13.3-mile Baltimore & Annapolis Trail in Arnold. It was where they ran, reset, and found the kind of peace and quiet that felt increasingly rare when they were government employees with high-intensity workdays. Over time, that familiar route—framed by woodlands and expansive views—became more than a running path; it shaped their understanding of what home should feel like.

“I always ran by this area,” Jenna Whitney says. “I’d look around and say: ‘Who gets to live here?’” Eventually, the answer became clear. Their running refuge became a real estate imperative, leading them first to Glen Oban, a waterfront community on the northwestern edge of Arnold. They lived there for a decade, raising two children and reimagining the home architecturally. The one thing they could never design their way out of: the constant hum of Baltimore Annapolis Boulevard. “We loved the house and all the work we had done,” Whitney says, “but we couldn’t change where it was. Mark kept saying, ‘I don’t envision this as our forever home.’ He wanted quiet—a step back from the road.”

This time, their search was more intuitive than logistical. They sought properties tucked away from traffic and rooted in the natural soundscape they’d fallen in love with years earlier. They wanted a lifestyle shaped by scenery, space, and nature, Whitney says.

They ultimately found it in the Ashby community of Arnold, just one neighborhood over. The community was perfect—but the low-slung, split-level rustic house with its dark, segmented rooms and awkward decking entry points needed a complete transformation to fully embrace its views of the Severn River and the couple’s minimalist sensibility. Whitney says she knew what they wanted, but even more importantly, what they didn’t want: “No rooms we’d never sit in. No spaces to clean just for show. Nothing extraneous.”



The kitchen was fully reimagined and oriented to face the water. Streamlined cabinetry stretches wall-to-wall, concealing appliances.

The Whitneys worked with TailorCraft Builders of Severna Park, who recommended Annapolis-based MKS Architecture to transform the new home. MKS's first challenge was determining how to turn the chopped-up layout into a modern, open floor plan that would honor the home's views of the Severn River and the couple's lifestyle. The original floor plan worked against the site: it blocked light, obscured the views, and forced circulation into tight, awkward paths and decking. The goal was to open it up, simplify the geometry, and create a calm, continuous experience within the existing footprint.

"When Jenna and Mark hired us to transform their waterfront property, they wanted a grown-up house with efficient use of space," says Melanie Stern, MKS owner and architect. "The existing home was well-loved but needed structural help. The floors in the main living space had sagged drastically over the years, the bedroom area had multiple floor levels due to previous renovation projects, and the roof needed to be rebuilt for safety," Stern says. "In the early stages of design, we presented options for the Whitneys to consider. The only thing we pushed was to create view corridors to the exterior in every room or space, bringing the scenery into any vantage point in the house."

The transformation began outside. What had been a wood-clad contemporary tucked quietly into the landscape is now a striking modern residence with a gallery-like presence. The original wraparound deck and weathered cedar siding gave way to a bold architectural language: deep charcoal cladding, warm horizontal wood accents, sculptural lines, and expansive panes of glass that frame the property's best views. A crisp white lower level grounds the composition, while railings and cantilevered balconies bring a sense of airiness. The redesign elevates the home from rustic retreat to modern statement—celebrating form, function, and setting.

Inside, the renovation reimagined every level. The former garage became a dedicated office for Mark—an engineering executive—as well as a gym and an additional bedroom. The main living and dining areas were reshaped into one spacious pavilion, with oversized operable casement windows that pull natural light across the floors from morning to evening. "Natural light and ventilation were extremely important to Jenna," Stern says. "She prefers not to use air conditioning and loves being able to open windows." Concealed shades provide privacy and glare control when needed; otherwise, the river becomes the room's artwork.

The powder room has gold accents and a modern vanity.



The kitchen was fully reimagined and oriented to face the water. Streamlined cabinetry stretches wall to wall, concealing appliances and creating the calm aesthetic the couple wanted. Soft cabinet lighting highlights the textures of the materials without overwhelming the space. Designed for indoor and outdoor living, an outdoor bar area was created just outside the kitchen window. An awning window opens nearly 90 degrees, providing cover over the kitchen tasks. “While I’m washing dishes, I can watch TV,” Jenna Whitney jokes. “I don’t mind being in the kitchen at all. It’s lovely.”

Wall-mounted step lights illuminate the open staircase leading to the upstairs, where renovation became a study in subtraction. The architect worked together with the couple to peel away decades of visual weight that crowded the eye. The bedrooms were reframed as quiet sanctuaries. The primary suite, with its four-panel slider, creates nearly a full wall of glass facing the water that opens to the deck. The palette—warm whites, driftwood, soft textiles—reflects the couple’s desire for a space free of distraction. The headboard, made of live oak, was repurposed from a table the couple had in their previous house, reflecting their desire to not let anything go to waste.

The primary suite, with its four-panel slider, creates nearly a full wall of glass facing the water that opens to the deck.



The primary bath flows from the bedroom and has similar modern finishes unified with gray monochromatic colors.





The transformation of the upper deck includes an outdoor bar and fireplace.

Each removed element brought the house closer to what the homeowners wanted, and each new feature added meaning. Despite the minimalist foundation, the décor is personal and bold, says Lisa Tullai, principal of Annapolis Interiors, who worked with the Whitneys on interior finishes, selections, and furniture placement. “Jenna is daring and has distinctive taste. She is not afraid of color or abstracts. It was refreshing and fun to work with her,” Tullai says.

Throughout the home, every piece of art carries a story. A piano—purchased while the couple was stationed in Russia—sits as a focal point and reminder of a significant chapter in their lives. Artwork throughout the home maps their travels and history. The homeowners wanted the architecture to step back so their pieces could step forward. The result is a home that feels personal—modern in form, but filled with meaning and memory. The home no longer resembles the dark split-level house they first walked into. It now embodies the serenity they used to chase during early morning runs along the B&A Trail. **AH**

ARCHITECT: Melanie Stern and Paul Schilder,
MKS Architecture
BUILDER: Aaron Drummond and Gabrielle Clarke,
TailorCraft Builders
INTERIOR DESIGNER: Lisa Tullai, Annapolis Interiors
LIGHTING DESIGN: Sarah Richter Design
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT: Diana Silva,
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