

A 'museum for living' in Lincoln

Couple overcomes skeptical neighbors with a modernist dream house filled with art

By **Anthony Flint**
GLOBE STAFF

LINCOLN — Architectural innovation is built into the landscape here, with some 50 clean-lined modernist homes interspersed in the woods, the cantilevered celebration of the Marcel Breuer house, and the simple elegance of the Bauhaus-inspired Walter Gropius house.

So when high-tech venture capitalist Bob Davoli and his wife, Eileen McDonagh, a professor of political science at Northeastern University, decided they wanted their modernist dream house to be on a wooded knoll overlooking Farrar Pond, they expected that their offbeat blueprints would be welcomed, maybe even celebrated, in this singularly affluent suburb.

That was 12 years ago. After acquiring the five-acre site piece by piece and hiring the architect Warren Schwartz of Boston-based Schwartz/Silver Architects Inc., the reaction by neighbors and the Lincoln Planning Board was uniformly skeptical. Nearby residents in large, conventional suburban homes on Winchelsea Lane thought the building would be garish, and party central. There was even a move to challenge the 14,500-square-foot structure on the basis of Lincoln's big-house law, meant to bar McMansions over 6,500 square feet.

"We just kept coming back and making the case," said Schwartz, who is putting the finishing touches on the project, which Davoli and McDonagh hope to finally occupy by Thanksgiving. "We showed images of the stone exterior and how it's the same color as the bark of the trees, and we just had to assure people, yes, it's really going to blend in like that."

The three-story home isn't exactly a wallflower. At the vanguard of residential design in the Boston area, it is part Frank Lloyd Wright and part Frank Gehry. The structure is designed like a fat rope coiled in a kind of three-dimensional figure eight, billowing and wrapping around itself, with elements starting on the outside and continuing on the inside, amid soaring windows, aluminum leaf, blonde bamboo wood, and a stairway that seems to float on air. The master bathroom is a grotto-like space that will have moss on the walls; the kitchen has a 20-foot island shaped like a giant surfboard; the living room fireplace is made of black steel; and there are two wine cellars.

Davoli would not divulge the cost of the house, but a safe assumption is that it exceeds the \$946,500 median sales price of single-family homes in town.

The design of the house was an act of collaboration from the beginning. Davoli, 56, the managing director of Sigma Partners who graced the cover of *BusinessWeek* in 2000 following the technology boom, said he gave Schwartz a basic idea and then asked him to "go riff on it," like a jazz musician. Being involved in the design every step of the way, he said, was what distinguishes architecture from the other fine arts.

"If you look at a Picasso, he doesn't care what you think," said Davoli, a major fund-raiser for the Institute of Contemporary Art, a member of the board of the American Repertory Theatre, and an aspiring jazz guitarist himself. "If I went out and got an architect and said I wanted something curvilinear, with lots of light and views of the woods, and he built a lime-green box, it might be great, but it would have no integrity."



GLOBE STAFF PHOTOS/DAVID KAMERMAN

Architect Warren Schwartz (center) looks over the house he is building in Lincoln (top photo) for Eileen McDonagh (left) and Bob Davoli.

McDonagh, 63, a respected author on women and sports, said the only requirement was that the building blend in with the topography and natural characteristics of the site -- about two miles south of Walden Pond in Concord -- and that it not be a trophy home on a pedestal of green lawn.

"The house follows the shape of the land -- it's sort of draped over it," she said. "We didn't level anything."

Another important component for the couple was art, inside and out. Coming up the driveway, guests will see a sculpture of three figures seemingly walking through a picture frame, a work by the Israel-born artist Ilan Averbuch. Local artists were invited to create works for specific spots in the house; Davoli plans to dedicate one wall as well for his collection of 24 guitars. Some features of the house, like the stairway that appears to float as it crosses over the main entranceway, are also

intended to be part of what Davoli calls "a museum for living."

The concerns of the neighbors notwithstanding, Davoli hopes to entertain in the house, something he has a flair for, and well accommodated in the interior's billowing spaces. Late last year he invited friends into the unfinished living room, serving impeccable wine and cheeses from so many different parts of France it was like a geography lesson. A jazz trio played while guests took turns exploring the home offices, spas, yoga room, home theater, outdoor roof deck, and birch-studded courtyard overlooking Farrar Pond.

Davoli and McDonagh are currently living in a modest, conventional three-bedroom house in Belmont.

Anthony Flint can be reached at flint@globe.com