

Growing Up with Bill Murray  
by Bryan Smith

JUNE 2005

# Chicago

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# OUT OF THE BOX

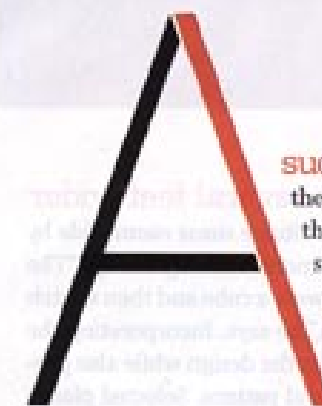
The mysterious  
façade of this  
East Village house  
conceals light-filled  
rooms, sweeping  
views, and access  
everywhere to the  
great outdoors

TEXT CHRISTINE NEWMAN ■ PHOTOGRAPHY NATHAN KIRKMAN ■ STYLING SUSAN VICTORIA

» Cedar lends a splash of color  
to the simple palette of the exterior  
(opposite); detail (this page)



» For the living and dining areas (this page) and the upstairs sitting room (opposite), the owners chose replicas of classics from the European Furniture Warehouse and Modernica. Gabert Farrar's painting of a Chicago street scene is from the Monique Meloche Gallery.



**A successful shared past was**

the starting point for this new house in the city's East Village—a three-story structure with a façade of vertical planes that conceal what goes on within. Mark R. Peters, the principal of Studio Dwell Architects, has collaborated with the owners, Karen and Bob Ranquist, on ten projects since 2000, from single-family homes to nine-unit condominium buildings, most on the Near Northwest Side. The residences produced by Bob's company, Ranquist Development, are distinguished by clean-lined contemporary architecture and high-end fixtures and appliances. As the head of RCR Realty, Karen handles the sale of the properties. "We try to design so the owners can adapt the space to whatever their needs are," Peters says, "rather than having the space dictate how it should be used."

The Ranquists were living in a renovated 1920s factory building in 2003 when a seven-lot parcel of land became available just

north—property on which they decided to construct two condominium buildings and a house of their own. After the new developments were sold, the couple would be living close to about 25 clients. "We have good relationships," Karen says. "Most of our customers purchase from us early on. They're architecturally savvy and very design oriented." Nevertheless, Bob thought it would be best not to make the house appear too welcoming.

Once past that mysterious façade, a visitor finds a light-filled setting with views that take in a second-floor loft space and sweep through the length of the house to the garden. There is an easy sense of flow, an absence of containment—except for the baby gates. Charlie, three, is obsessed with the popular TV character Bob the Builder; Alec, 11 months, is content and quick to smile. They are substantially outweighed by Camden and Fenway, the family's Weimaraners, but the relationship between the children and the dogs is copacetic. That also seems to be the case with the adults.

"Bob and Karen trust my design sense," Peters says, "so when they came to me on this one, it was merely, Here's the program—we need this many bedrooms and a family room and so on. Then I just put the parts together."

"We went over a few things, and then let him do what he wanted," Bob recalls. "We're totally on the same page."



» Fenway takes a break in the master bedroom (this page) illuminated by a ribbon of windows near the ceiling and light fixtures from Artemide. The stainless-steel and laminate components in the kitchen (opposite) are from Arclinea.

### Because the property is several feet wider

than a typical lot, Peters was able to situate some rooms side by side rather than placing them in a more isolating lineup. "The idea was to look at the house as if it were a cube and then stretch and pull it to define different areas," he says. Incorporating the same materials inside and out unifies the design while also providing variations in texture, color, and pattern. Selected planes are made of concrete block, ground-face concrete block (its surface smoothed by a machine), and cedar. "We wanted to keep the palette simple, so we used whites, blacks, and grays," Peters explains. "The splash of color comes from the cedar and the plants." Windows rise vertically where some of the planes intersect, lending transparency to the design and light to the interior. The aluminum window frames and the stair railings and gates in steel are black—a minimal accent, a linear connecting link.

Only about a fourth of the windows in the house are clear; the rest, where privacy is a concern, are frosted. Peters believes that frosted glass eliminates the need for curtains or blinds—



and the possibility that clients might make choices that would compromise his aesthetic. (Not that he would expect that of the Ranquists.)

The width of the lot also provided enough room on the first floor for a central core containing the stairs to the next level, a closet, and a powder room. That left all four exterior walls open to light. From early morning to dusk, Karen says, the dogs follow the movement of the sun, seeking out hot spots.

### Convenience was important to Karen, and

a ground-level entrance alleviated a common problem for equipment-overloaded parents. "You're not schlepping up stairs with strollers in the rain," she says. In the foyer, Luxor Grey limestone tile from Ann Sacks, an element that reappears elsewhere in the house, gives way to red oak floors for the rest of the expanse, from the living and dining areas to the combined kitchen and family room. Peters designed a bookcase in the same wood to establish a division between the foyer and the L-shaped living and dining areas.

Complementing the space are suitably spare renditions of classics from Modernica and the European Furniture Warehouse—a Noguchi coffee table, Barcelona chairs. A Cluster chandelier from Lightology, a dangling mass of wires and bare light bulbs, is suspended from the two-story ceiling in the dining area. The table, with a white composite surface and stainless-steel legs, was designed by Antonio Citterio, the Italian talent behind Arclinea kitchens. Aaron Wilson, an architect and an owner of the Arclinea Chicago show room, has also worked on a number of projects with the Ranquists. After Peters defined the space for their new kitchen, Wilson advised on the layout.

Arclinea is deliberate about addressing specific tasks in its designs, Wilson says, and also about creating installations in which the components read as freestanding furniture rather than built-ins. "This kitchen is divided into two islands and a utility wall," he explains, "and in the utility wall you have a wine cooler, a refrigerator, and an oven. On the first island you have the prep, cleaning, and washing side—sink, dishwasher. And on the second island, you have a cooktop, space for pots and pans,

» Charlie steps up to a Duravit sink in the master bathroom.



and a ventilation hood." The palette remains consistent: the utility wall is a white laminate; the islands are stainless steel with concrete countertops. Across from the kitchen is a sitting area with two Natuzzi leather sofas and a jumble of toys. "We spend so much time in this room after work, eating, watching TV," says Karen. "Charlie plays here; the baby is down here. It's just the easiest room for us to be in. The dogs can go in and out."

To make the walled-in garden an extension of the kitchen and the family room, four feet of soil was added to raise the yard to the level of the house. This is one of three enviable outdoor destinations. On the second floor, a cedar bridge leads to a party space built above the garage and weatherproofed with a matching wood canopy. Charlie's and Alec's rooms overlook the street on this level. At the opposite end are an office and a loftlike sitting area with Zenith shell chairs and a Case Study day bed from Modernica.

The master suite on the third floor is spacious, as well, and opens to a large deck that offers privacy and an elevated perspective on the city. A ribbon of four horizontal windows near the ceiling is another source of illumination. In a corner, a clear vertical window channels light to a frosted pane in the bathroom's shower, a space big enough for a few friends and elegantly tiled in planks of Luxor Grey limestone. A bathtub and a pair of Duravit sinks with crisp unframed mirrors designed and installed by Peters anchor the center of the room.

Bob's must-have retreat is in the basement—a plush movie viewing facility outfitted by Theatre Design Associates. The children have a playroom here; the adults can aspire to purity in the steam room and sauna. Wherever the Ranquists go in the house, there are good places to be.

### But recently, the concept of happily ever after

in this house took a surprising twist. Hoping to interest a couple in a project on which they were just breaking ground, the Ranquists showed them their place as an example of their design sensibility. Kate Karet, a senior vice president at the public relations agency Weber Shandwick, and her husband, Jeff Levick, the director of global markets for Google, had looked at about 30 places with no luck; they needed more room for their daughter, Lily, now 17 months. The Ranquists' house, they decided, was just what they wanted. They made an offer, and it was accepted. Apparently for a developer, proceeding to the next experiment is no big deal. Peters and the Ranquists are already pushing the envelope on a new place in Bucktown. "We're constantly moving on," Karen says, "and we knew that Kate and Jeff would love the house as much as we did."

Karet and Levick were scheduled to move in late this spring. "The house is so simple and ultramodern," says Karet. Their collection of Florence Knoll furniture seems to belong here, and so does their bulldog, Chubby Bubbles. "She's all white," Karet explains. "She will look perfect in the house." ■



### Resources

**Abode**, 1904 West North Avenue; 773-227-6400. The acrylic painting in the master bedroom by Lisa Kowalski.  
**Ann Sacks**, 501 North Wells Street; 312-923-0919. The tile.  
**Arclinea Chicago**, 314 West Superior Street; 312-335-3855. The kitchen cabinetry and design. The dining room table.  
**Artemide**, 223 West Erie Street; 312-475-0100. The lamps in the master bedroom.  
**Bedside Manor**, 2056 North Halsted Street; 773-404-2020. The towels by Yves Delorme.  
**Bloomington's Home & Furniture**, 600 North Wabash Avenue; 312-324-

7500. Donna Karan Collection linens and decorative pillows.

**CB2**, 3757 North Lincoln Avenue; 773-755-3900. The place mats used as a runner on the dining table. The white Orbs rug in the upstairs sitting area. The steel toothbrush holder in the master bathroom.

**Community Home Supply**, 3924 North Lincoln Avenue; 773-472-7010. The plumbing fixtures.

**Concrete Age Artworks**, 1932 South Halsted Street; 312-226-3542. The concrete work.

**European Furniture Warehouse**, 2145 West Grand Avenue; 312-243-1955. The Barcelona chairs, the dining chairs, and the bed frame.

**Fly Bird**, 719 Lake Street, Oak Park; 708-383-3330. The Mr. Cold soap pump and the Ice Bat doll in the master bathroom. The Big Shoom Alessi steel bowl.

**Guava**, 3327 North Broadway; 773-348-2432. The Kenshoma ceramic vase on the dining room table.

**The Land of Nod**, 900 West North Avenue; 312-475-9903. The bathroom stairs.

**Lightology**, 215 West Chicago Avenue; 312-944-1000. The Cluster chandelier.

**Luminare**, 301 West Superior Street; 312-

664-9582. The Tuto elliptical ottoman. **Modernica**, 535 North Franklin Street; 312-222-1808. The Noguchi coffee table and the furniture in the upstairs sitting room. **Monique Meloche Gallery**, 118 North Peoria Street; 312-455-0299. The artwork by Gabert Farrar.

**Orange Skin**, 223 West Erie Street, 312-335-1033, and 1429 North Milwaukee Avenue, 773-394-4500. The Quinze & Milan resin-covered foam stool used as a bedside table.

**Oscar Isberian Rugs**, 122 West Kinzie Street; 312-467-1212. The Indian rug in the living and dining area.

**Sproot Home**, 745 North Damen Avenue; 312-226-5950. The garden design.

**Studio Dwell Architects** (Mark R. Peters, principal), 1732 West Hubbard Street; 312-666-4601.

**Sur La Table**, 52-54 East Walton Street; 312-337-0600. The trays in the kitchen. **Theatre Design Associates**, 2224 West Fulton Street; 312-829-8703. The home theatre.

**West Elm**, 2155 West 22nd Street, Oak Brook; 630-368-3591. The throw pillow in the bedroom.



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