

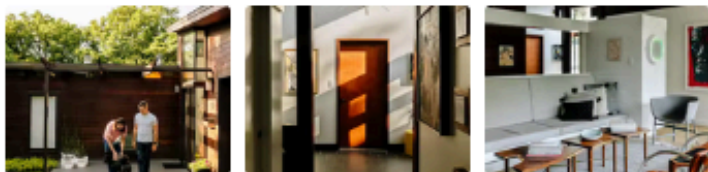
Dwell Magazine

An Artful Restoration Returns a Louisville Home to Its Midcentury Roots

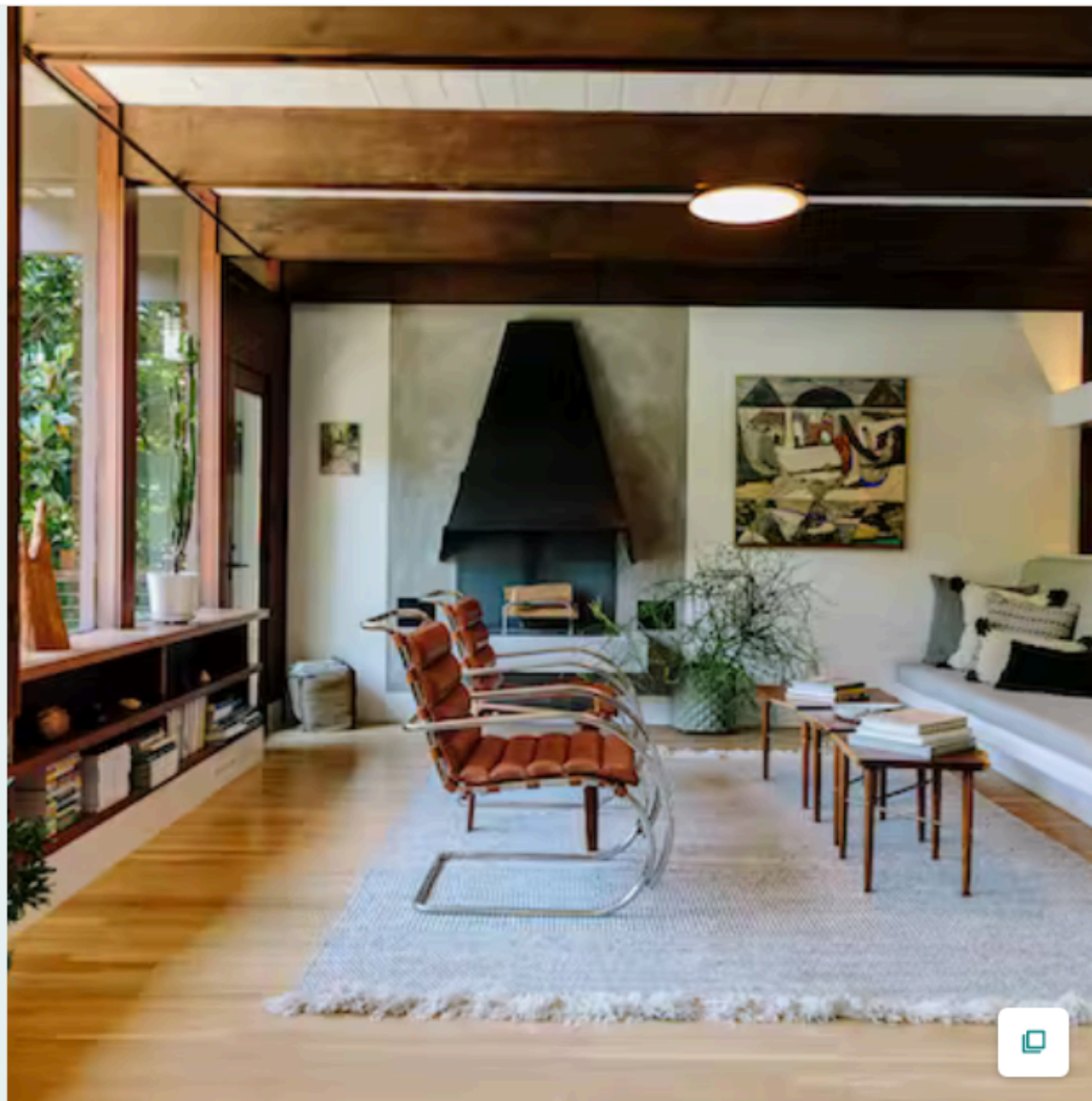
John Brooks and Erik Eaker hit undo on an awkward aughts revamp with the help of local firm Rock Paper Hammer.

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After years of trying out life in the hustle and bustle of cities like London and Chicago, artist John Brooks and his husband, Erik Eaker, were looking to permanently settle into a quiet oasis in Louisville, Kentucky, close to John's family.



[LINK TO VIDEO](#)

Having lived in the Mies van der Rohe tower at 860 Lake Shore Drive, the couple had their hearts set on a midcentury-modern house. "We also wanted to stay close to the city and to Cherokee Park," John explains—two requirements that added challenge to their search.

Then, as they were consulting with designer Emily Paprocki of Rock Paper Hammer, they casually inquired about a midcentury ranch (one of few in the area) they had seen on her website. It had a living area and kitchen facing a deck overlooking the park, with more bedrooms and living space downstairs. It wasn't on the market, but Paprocki, who had kept in touch with owners Kristopher and Tonya Abeln, said they might be willing to sell to the right buyer—that is, someone who would be a good steward of the house they had worked so hard to restore to its 1953 roots.

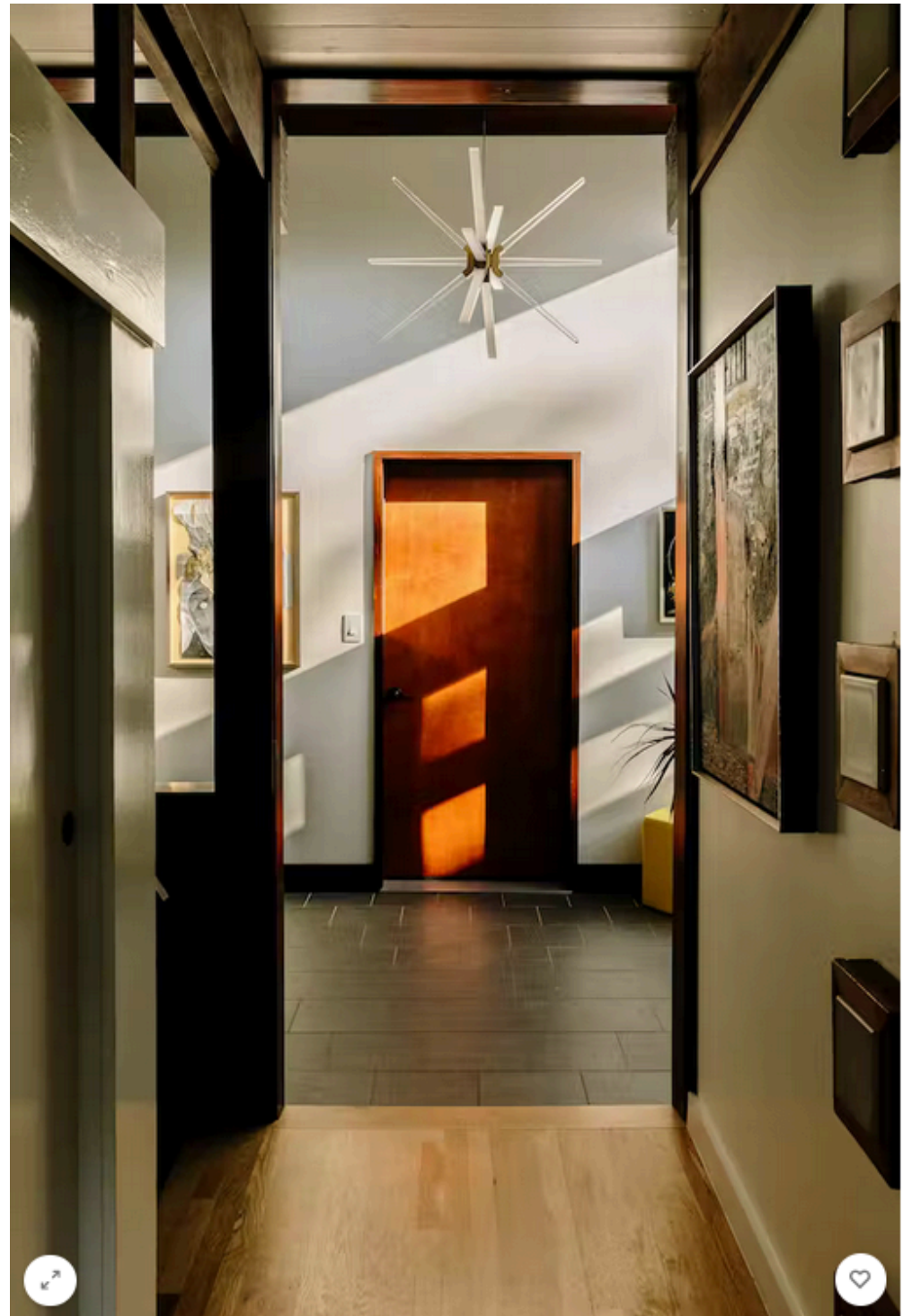
With Paprocki, the Abelns had replaced vinyl siding with handsome coumarou wood, which the team also used for the deck at the back of the house. They removed a sloped roof that had been built on top of the original flat roof and added a layer of rigid insulation and a slight slope for proper drainage.

"There were definitely some functional issues with the original design that another owner had tried to address," Paprocki says. "But they did it at the expense of the style of the house."



John Brooks and Erik Eaker called on architecture firm Rock Paper Hammer to restore a 1953 ranch home in Louisville, Kentucky, to its modernist roots. The architects had already overhauled the entryway and garage with the previous owners.

Photo by Lucy Hewett



A Photon chandelier by Tech Lighting hangs in the entryway, surrounded by John and Erik's contemporary art collection.

Photo by Lucy Hewett

The Abelns, sensing Erik and John's good intentions, sold the house to the grateful couple, who contracted Paprocki to continue the restoration by installing new hardwood flooring and completely renovating the kitchen and main bathroom, all while maintaining the simplicity of the architecture.

"There's nothing extraneous. The house is 3,160 square feet, but all of the spaces are small and intimate. There's an honesty about everything."

—John Brooks, resident

Perhaps the biggest challenge for the new owners was deciding how to display their sizable contemporary art collection in a home with lots of windows and little wall space. "It's hard to move pieces around," concedes Erik, who adds that the house works well with the collection. "It just seems to welcome art."

After moving into their new home, John and Erik learned more about its original architect, Werner Feibes, who had fled Nazi Germany as a boy. Feibes graduated from the University of Cincinnati before settling in Schenectady, New York, where he and his life partner, James Schmitt, established an esteemed architecture firm and, curiously enough, amassed their own impressive collection of contemporary art.

"I'm not someone who believes in fate," John says. "But I feel like we are very good stewards for this house."



In the living area, existing built-in seating is complemented by Mies van der Rohe lounge chairs and custom coffee tables by Michael James Moran.

Photo by Lucy Hewett

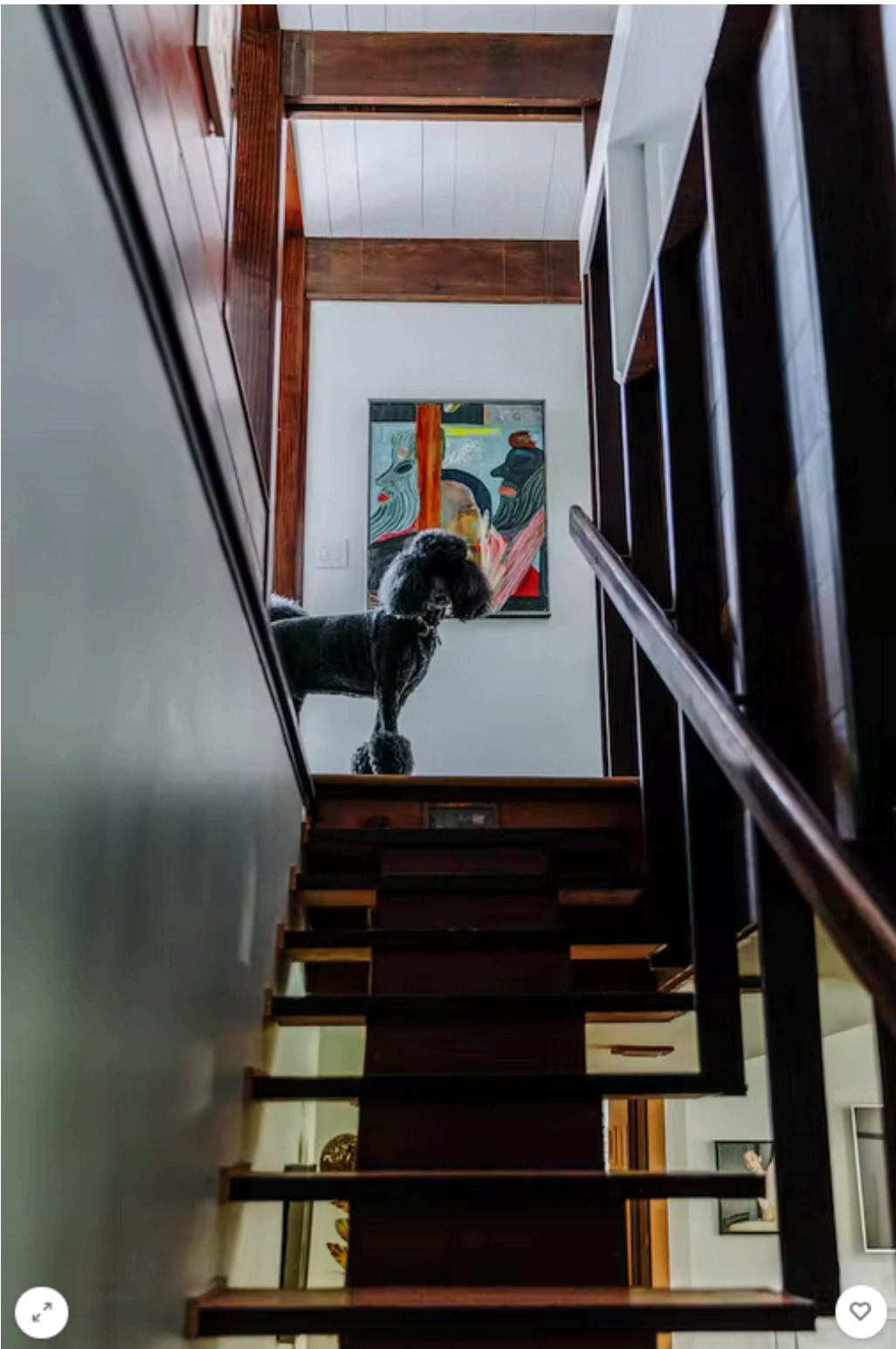


Photo by Lucy Hewett



The original owners made the shoji panels themselves, and John and Erik replaced the rice paper. "There's something special about knowing the screens were made by hand," Erik says.

Photo by Lucy Hewett



Timeline of the Home

1952: Gerhard and Mary Jo Hertz hire architecture student Werner Feibes to design a modern, cost-efficient home overlooking Louisville's Cherokee Park.

1954: The couple contribute many hours of hand-finishing to cut costs, and the house is completed.

1965: A suite is added to the main level to accommodate Gerhard's mother.

2002: The home is sold to a new owner, who adds vinyl siding and a sloped roof over the original design.

2010: Kristopher and Tonya Abeln purchase the home.

2015: Architecture firm Rock Paper Hammer uses Feibes's original drawings to overhaul the exterior and the entryway while connecting the house to the garage. The firm also installs a coumarou deck along the back of the house.

2017: John Brooks and Erik Eaker purchase the home and contract Rock Paper Hammer and Deep Creek builders for interior renovations, including redoing the kitchen and main bathroom.

2018: Myers + Co. Landscape Architecture adds a swimming pool and completes landscaping work in the backyard.

2020: Deep Creek Builders remodels the lower level to create more living space just before the pandemic prompts a lockdown in Louisville.

Project Credits:

Architecture: RPH Studio, Emily Fisher Paprocki AIA

Builder & General Contractor: Deep Creek Builders, TM Faversham / @deepcreekbuilders

Landscape Design: Myers + Company Landscapes, Josh Myers PLA, ASLA, APLD

Cabinetry: Rock Paper Hammer, Derek Paprocki



"I like coming home to a place that feels like a cabin. The house is not overstated—it lives very simply. It's a house you can camp out in," continues Erik.

Photo by Lucy Hewett



Photo by Lucy Hewett



A coumarou deck at the back of the house provides John, Erik, and their dog, Ludwig, with a tranquil place to unwind. "We get an immense amount of enjoyment out of it," Erik says.

Photo by Lucy Hewett



The pool and surrounding landscape connect the architecture with the wooded park just beyond the yard. "We used the softer textures of ornamental grasses, Japanese maples, and perennial plantings to balance the rectilinear lines of the pool and the house," says Josh Myers of Myers + Co. Landscape Architecture.

Photo by Lucy Hewett



Photo: Lucy Hewett



Photo: Lucy Hewett

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Brooks Eaker Project

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ARCHITECT Rock Paper Hammer
LOCATION Louisville, Kentucky

