

WHERE
EXCEPTIONAL
TASTE LIVES

VERANDA

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DESIGNERS AT HOME

EXPERT LESSONS
IN TRUE-TO-YOU
DECORATING



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*Lauren
Santo
Domingo's*
**EASY,
ELEGANT
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LESSONS *in* DISORDER

For acclaimed classicist **Gil Schafer III**, a monumental life change yields a new perspective on the shape-shifting power of home.

YOU HAD NO IDEA, DID YOU?" my wife, Courtney, often jokes. The great American author Henry Miller observed that the older he got, the less he knew. I'd put it this way: In my case, the older I've gotten, the more I realize how much I still have to learn. And of all the things about which, to borrow my wife's formulation, I had no idea, the most important was that I needed to live life a little more richly than I had before to understand what makes a truly successful home a forever home.

A few years ago I got married. Nobody ever thought I'd do it, and frankly, at some point, even I thought I'd never do it. For the past three decades, I had immersed myself in designing houses. I'd built a successful architectural practice in New York, expanded (and reexpanded) that practice, pored over scale and volume and vista, written books on contemporary classical architecture, lectured around the country—the things you do when your passion aligns faithfully with purpose. Admittedly that kind of order was gratifying. It made sense.

Then at the not-so-tender age of 57, an incomparable woman welcomed me into her life and I became the stepdad to two teenagers. My orderly bordering-on-the-fetishistic, perfectly hermetic, always camera-ready single-guy life went utterly out the window. Suddenly my pristine Greek Revival country house had a big plastic tub—filled with baby ducks!—in the living room, as that's what my stepdaughter wanted as her distraction from COVID isolation. Suddenly there was a 50-gallon dragon lizard tank in the bedroom upstairs—and a monumental gaming computer obscuring my classical columns! Suddenly the hushed environment of my library-like apartment in New York City's Greenwich Village, with its carefully curated collection of stuff, seemed so irrelevant to what was going on in my life.

It had been easy for me to design a house that seemed perfect when nothing ever took place in it that wasn't my idea. But what I have learned, as my life has evolved, is a house—a home—that embraces the glorious mess that is the way we



live day-to-day can still be functional, beautiful, and filled with joy. Indeed, a home is in many ways defined by the conflicting, cacophonous agendas that can coexist within it.

Perhaps the most indispensable quality of an enduring home is that it is adaptive to the evolution of life—the house can shape-shift. These recent years have expanded my understanding of the ways that a home can tell a story about you—your family, your passions, your style. It's not just the business of architecture; it's the business of joy.

"You had no idea, did you?"

No, I had no idea. ♦

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: The living room in Schafer's Millbrook, New York, home (recipient of a Palladio Award in 2002), which he now shares with his wife, Courtney; her two children; and, on occasion, a flock of baby ducks

Excerpted, in part, from Schafer's new book, **Home at Last: Enduring Design for the New American House** (Rizzoli, 2024). This is the third in the architect's trilogy and available now.