



INDOOR / OUTDOOR



Ranch Reprise

AFTER YEARS OF INCONGRUOUS ALTERATIONS, SEXTON LAWTON ARCHITECTURE PEELS BACK THE LAYERS ON A MIDCENTURY BELCARO PARK RANCH TO REVEAL ITS FULL POTENTIAL.

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BELCARO PARK is one of Denver's less documented midcentury neighborhoods. Rambling one-story "California Contemporary" ranches and modest post-war ranch-style homes populate the area's tree-lined streets and gentle rolling hills that surround the historic Phipps mansion. Building new custom homes in this idyllic, inner-city setting has rivalled buying vintage and renovating. As a result, fewer expansive ranches on large lots remain intact. When one does surface on the market, it takes a discerning eye to appreciate the timeless attributes of these well-worn gems.

Jenn and Nick Kemp's ranch romance began when they purchased their first home in Albuquerque, New Mexico shortly after they were married. They fell in love with home's flow, livability and how it embraced the desert landscape. "Once we lived in a ranch, the style and feel grew on us," said Jenn.

After Jenn completed her radiology residency in Albuquerque and landed her first job in Denver, the couple searched the local housing market for a home with similar appeal. An unassuming ranch in Belcaro Park suited them well until their growing family and a pair of dogs placed a premium on space. Reluctant to leave the neighborhood, the Kemps revisited a sprawling ranch that had cycled on and off the market for nearly a decade. With multiple owners since 1954, its interior had been remodeled beyond recognition. "We kept looking at it, but couldn't visualize how it would work for us," said Nick.

Enter Matt Oberlies, a friend and building contractor, who suggested the couple tour the home with architect Matt Lawton of Denver-based Sexton Lawton Architecture, owned by a husband and wife team. Jenn and Nick were immediately drawn to Lawton's gentle demeanor and his initial ideas for the home. With a shared vision for stewardship of the home's original character, the team embarked on a journey of renewing the once-classic ranch.

With two children in the mix, Gigi and Wylie, and two Labs, Kona and Chief, the Kemps wanted to be sure the new home would be in complete harmony with their lifestyle. Nick, a lawyer who works primarily from home, loved the rustic red sandstone fireplaces

PROJECT CREDITS

ARCHITECT

Sexton Lawton Architecture

CONTRACTOR

Oberlies Construction

INTERIOR DESIGN

Sexton Lawton Architecture

STRUCTURAL ENGINEER

Studio 8.18 Engineering

LANDSCAPE DESIGN

Luna Landscaping

POOL CONTRACTOR

The Pool and Spa Experts

CUSTOM CABINETS

Milarc Cabinets

STONE MASON

Segura's Masonry

STEEL FABRICATOR FOR STAIRS

BS Custom Creations



The Kemps wanted a seamless floor plan that allowed unobstructed views throughout the house but also areas that afforded privacy. New custom walnut cabinetry throughout is a nod to the midcentury aesthetic and serves as functional room dividers. Much to the homeowners' delight, sandstone fireplaces with built-in shelves and raised hearths were uncovered in the renovation process.

“Redoing this house was one of the most rewarding, pleasurable experiences of my entire life, right up there with my wedding day and graduating from medical school. It was truly a joy.” -Jenn Kemp, homeowner



and the idea of being surrounded by wood-burning fires. Jenn envisioned the house as an oversized cabana for seamless roaming from inside to out, but with distinct zones for kids and adults. While their wish list included more square footage, they were sensitive to the character of ranch-style homes that were typically built out, rather than up. A second story addition was a difficult proposition, especially in a neighborhood with strict covenants. The Kemps agreed with Lawton's position: "If you are going to

touch the house, it's got to fit in and look like it's always been there, at least from the neighbors' perspective."

Lawton enlisted his 3D computer design skills to communicate to his clients how the second-floor addition and interior would look and function for them. He spent hours modeling every part of the house to illustrate the experience from each vantage point. "The models allowed the homeowners to dive in quickly," said Lawton. "It was the closest thing to a real-time design process."

During construction, the architect, clients, and contractor would meet daily to experience the progress and evolving feel of the home. The process was a rare example of collaboration according to Lawton. "No one person was leading with a myopic view of what the house should be," he said. "With Jenn and Nick providing input at every stage, it was a true dialogue. I think the final design reflects exactly what they wanted."

The home's fluidity is a testament to the exquisite precedent set by California

Contemporary ranch homes. "The indoor-outdoor connection was already there," said Lawton of the home's existing glass walls and orientation to the site. "We just enhanced what was there." Fully remodeled, the Kemps' house features an elegant flow and the ability to "unzip" completely to bring the outside in. The inconspicuous second level addition is nestled into the long, original roof line and looks as if it grew naturally from it. The mass of the two-story addition lands in the secluded backyard and serves to define a series

of outdoor rooms. From the street, the resulting home appears as traditional and unassuming as when it was built 60 years ago. "Neighbors stop by all the time," said Nick, "and tell us how much they appreciate the design." The original ranch houses, with their open, flexible plans, were designed to keep pace with modern lifestyles. The Kemps' deftly remodeled ranch demonstrates that enduring quality. 

FACING PAGE: The two-story addition is only fully visible from within the Kemps' leafy backyard. The addition was designed to recede into the existing roof line to maintain the home's original scale and context in the neighborhood. Retractable window and door systems allow the home to "unzip," heightening the indoor-outdoor experience.

ABOVE: The sculptural zigzag staircase is fabricated with a steel substructure and clad in stained White Oak. The transparent glass handrail with thin steel supports allows natural southern light to illuminate the stairs throughout the day.



The Kemps wanted to emulate a European-style kitchen that would be minimal in appearance, but highly functional. Their induction cook-top is centered in an island of white Calcutta marble. Custom base cabinets at the island have a cool gray automobile paint finish. The perimeter countertops are fabricated from absolute black granite while the walnut base cabinets continue the classic midcentury vibe. A sleek folding panel window system allows the kitchen to have full exposure to the exterior.

BEFORE

"At some point it was open ranch," said Nick Kemp of the home's original floor plan, "but a series of additions and remodels made the layout odd. You had to walk through a bedroom and a closet to get to another bedroom." Although the existing house had large expanses of glass oriented to the backyard, much of the openness had been altered with compartmentalized spaces and low ceilings. "The great thing about these one-story ranches is that they are built fairly simply, allowing for easy intervention," said architect Matt Lawton. Instead of altering the footprint of the house, they strategically subtracted walls and added glass.



TOP: Luminescent tile flows like a wave from floor to ceiling in the powder room, which doubles as a cabana. Built-in towel storage and easily cleanable finishes make it easy for swimmers to change quickly before heading to the pool.

BOTTOM: In keeping with the spirit of a midcentury home, architect Matt Lawton designed built-in furnishings to maximize efficiency and minimize clutter. One child's room features a floating bunk bed suspended by a cable and bookshelves, doubling as steps to the upper bunk. Built-in storage along the west-facing windows becomes a perfect perch for reading or capturing mountain views.



COMPUTER MODELS

Lawton employed his 3D computer modeling skills to illustrate every angle of the house to his clients. This helped the homeowners understand their living space from every vantage point and to achieve their desired balance of openness and privacy. "We all felt like we knew the house before construction even started," said Lawton.