

# EAST COAST HOME+DESIGN

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# SYMMETRICAL GRANDEUR

Cardello Architects plays with perspective to evoke  
an illusion of size on a relatively smaller scale.

Story by Emily Ballard | Photography by Dennis Carbo







The grand symmetrical design is complemented with columns, an arched entryway and large windows that embrace luxury mixed with comfort.









The uneven elevation of the lot was addressed with stone terracing and an expansive covered porch.

**W**hen the homeowners of this riverside residential home in Greenwich, CT, approached Cardello Architects to help with the design, they envisioned a family home that matched the style and vernacular of the area, but with unique details that would fit their needs. With site limitations and elevation challenges, the team of architects created a symmetrical home that greets guests with style and finesse, and offers comfort beyond the mahogany front door.

Robert Cardello, the company's founder, graduated from Tulane University with a Master's Degree in Architecture. His path was clear to him from the start, and after graduating college and getting some hands-on experience with a few local firms, he wanted to branch out on his own. In 1998 Robert took the plunge and opened his own practice. He describes this leap of faith as courageous, given that he began this endeavor the very same month that he bought his first house and had his first child.

The business flourished, and six years later, David LaPierra joined him as a partner, bringing an architecture degree and expertise in engineering and construction. The team, along with Rachelle Roll as project manager, designs custom new construction homes and renovations primarily for residential use. It is considered a full-service

architecture firm, overseeing the design process from consultation, to development, to bidding, to construction. The team's collaborative approach ensures that the expectations of its clients are fully realized, with its creative integrity expressed in the high-quality work it delivers. "We try to take our time with the whole process and follow the traditional path that an architect takes, where we are actively involved in every aspect of the project," explains Robert.

### **Curbside Appeal**

This property rests in a beautiful area by the water, surrounded by picturesque houses in a residential neighborhood. The client and architects agreed on a design that kept with the vernacular of the area, with elements of cedar, natural stone, New England stone veneer and a more traditional shingle-style aesthetic. "The design kind of revolved around the house having a strong, majestic street presence, without having a massive buildable footprint," David says. The home is unique, says Robert, in that it has streets running on either side, and therefore has double frontage: essentially two front yards and no backyard.

The initial concept presented to the homeowner peaked his interest. He was attracted to the custom features that Cardello Architects utilize on their homes, but had concerns it would appear to be a smaller home. It was important to him that the residence had a









The spiral stairway, situated in one of the symmetrical tower elements, sheds light on the contrasting white and darker wood tones.

feeling of scale on a street lined with large houses. “The approach to the house is supposed to evoke a grand appearance, and once you get inside the house, it becomes more friendly and easy to interact with,” Dave says. “The scale and size of the rooms are very manageable and comfortable.”

To achieve the client’s wishes, the team used the technique of symmetry. “It has some of the more whimsical details that you would see in a shingle-style house, but it is done as a very symmetrical house, which is suggestive of a very formal design,” Robert explains. He says they created an interesting blend by incorporating an informal language of architecture to be paired with the symmetrical design. Rachelle adds, “Architecture should not dominate its landscape, but respond to it. So our goal was to create a relatively large house that in no way ‘felt’ large.”

Some of the materials the client was drawn to were the stone and different textures of shingle, the curved inset shingles on the gables, and the eyebrow window. The architects were familiar with many of these elements from their work on other projects. “The mix of materials and colors play off each other, so that the bold, black windows pop against the white trim, but then the yellow cedar roofing naturally grays over time to match the shingle Maibec siding,” ex-

plains Rachelle. “It lets the textures of those materials really create dimension.”

### Unconventional Floor Plan

A common design concept that many homeowners and builders have adopted is the open floor plan, with space to flow from room to room. While this homeowner wanted to capture certain elements of this trend, he leaned toward a more compartmentalized layout. “He wanted the best of both worlds,” says David. “He wanted an open floor plan for his everyday space, meaning the kitchen to family room and dining areas, but he also wanted some private destination-type rooms, like a library and wine room.”

Robert describes this design as an “anti-center hall colonial.” The architects combined the living and dining area toward the back of the house, creating one bigger and more formal room with a den at the end of it. As you circulate around to the front and the right wing of the house, the more casual kitchen and family room serve as a comfortable and functional area of the home. This layout creates a more L-shaped plan. “When you take the center hall out of the house, it opens up the ability to have an open plan with spaces that sort of borrow from one another,” Robert explains, “because even though it feels like a big house, it really is not in relative terms.”









The L-shaped floor plan winds from the kitchen to a more formal living and dining area.

This juxtaposition between open and traditional carried over into the finishes and fixtures of the design. Although the client leaned more toward a traditional plan, he also appreciated a more modern and transitional material palette. David describes unique materials, such as rifts on oak stained in a driftwood-type color, a kitchen island with a waterfall edge, and a custom stainless-steel hood. “This is the new trend for us—classic exterior with clean and open floor plans,” says Rachelle. “A ship-lapped stair tower anchors the circulation spaces, and a large kitchen opens up to a vaulted family room.”

The master bathroom coincided with the symmetrical theme, with a free-standing soaking tub flanked by two vanities with black and gray zebra tile on the floor and walls, and varying styles of glass enclosures. These are a few of the elements that blend with the more traditional style of the home, resulting in a cohesive and bright home design.

### Unique Challenges

As a new construction home, the building site presented some unique challenges for the architects. Zoning and floor area ratio (FAR) regulations limited the total floor area and square footage of the design. This is why it was so important to the homeowner that the house conveyed a feeling of magnitude and scale.

The designers met this challenge with particular attention to the outdoor living spaces. Since this area did not count toward the FAR, the design included a plethora of covered porches. Additionally, a large finished basement was created, adding to the perceived scale the homeowners were looking for.

The road on the entry side of the home was 20 feet higher than the road on the back side, therefore it was important to effectively terrace the property in relation to the landscape, a large undertaking for the designers. “Trying to create some privacy there was a challenge because the elevation change from the road to the back, and the road to the front, was so extreme,” David













The kitchen was built smaller in size, but with streamlined functionality and modern touches such as a waterfall edge island and custom hood.

explains. “We did that by using the covered porch and the terraces that followed the topography down.”

The large porch succeeded in making the house appear bigger than its actual size, and created the perfect place for entertaining by the fireplace, fully taking advantage of outdoor living and sidestepping the FAR limitations.

#### **A Lasting Impression**

David refers to the entryway as the “handshake of the house.” As

guests arrive in the driveway, they are met with elegant symmetry. The swooping roofline and the columns with stone piers lead to a rich wooden door resting beneath an arched barreled ceiling. The balcony above adds to the feeling of scale. These touches produce an approachable yet sophisticated welcome.

“The fact that it is incredibly symmetrical is a strong part of this house, and I think that plays into the fact that it feels like the architecture has some strength to it, some grounding to it,” David says. “It is not rambling; it is strategic and symmetrical.”





The interior of the house offers warmth and refinement. An abundance of windows creates a light and airy atmosphere. The color palette is neutral, with wood floors throughout, and an impressive spiral staircase provides additional light and access to the fully finished lower level. David explains that the team's approach to architectural design is all-encompassing. While Cardello trusts the interior designer for paint colors, fabrics, drapery and furniture, his firm provides input on tile selection, hardware selection and plumbing fixtures.

For 20 years, Cardello Architects has been designing luxury homes for their clients. The details and creativity of their work is what sets them apart as one of the leading architecture firms in the country. As Robert reflects on this project, he appreciates the obstacles they overcame to position the home perfectly on the lot to conjure a noble and calming presence. "I hate when I force myself into such strong symmetry, but there are houses that are just perfectly symmetrical, and this was one of them," Robert says. "To me, there is something very pretty about that. It is recognizable, and it creates interesting architecture."









The outdoor living area increased space for relaxation and entertaining while keeping within square footage building limitations.



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