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ARCHITECTS & HOME DESIGNERS

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A modern living room with a prominent red wall and a yellow bar. A light blue sofa is positioned in the foreground, and a wooden coffee table holds a white sculpture and a candle. A staircase with a white railing is visible in the background. The room features large windows with glass block inserts and a white fireplace on the left.

ARCHITECTS AND HOME DESIGNERS

Home to some of the most brilliant designers and visionary developers in the world, the New York environs is bursting with an unprecedented abundance of gorgeous homes and lavish communities. *New York Living* profiles four of those who have been shaping the latest trends in home style.

By Steve Cutler



"It is harder to do modern architecture, because it's so original, than to do traditional, which has so much history you can borrow from."

—Bruce Nagel, Architect

Bruce Nagel

“I’m attracted to the aesthetic of modern architecture,” says architect Bruce Nagel. “It is harder to do modern architecture, because it’s so original, than to do traditional, which has so much history you can borrow from.”

While Nagel’s practice affords him the opportunity to design in a range of styles, his affinity for contemporary architecture is one reason he feels at home in the aesthetically open-minded Hamptons, where architecture is appreciated as an art form, and originality is encouraged.

Nagel graduated with a degree in Architecture from the University of Texas, and got his Master’s degree in Architecture from Harvard. “The philosophy of both schools,” he recalls, “was solving problems in a functional way, which is one of the philosophies of modern architecture. You don’t use the formula of symmetry, formality, to develop a solution. You let the exposure of the site to north, south, east and west and the requirements of the client dictate the form and shape of the architecture. It’s working from the inside out rather than the outside in.”

From Boston, Nagel moved to Manhattan, where he worked with two firms renown for modern architecture:

Richard Meier & Partners, the firm responsible for the Getty Museum in Los Angeles, and the ubiquitous Gwathmey/Siegel & Associates. While working in the Hamptons for Gwathmey/Siegel, he met his wife, settled in East Hampton and opened his own firm.

According to Nagel, “There’s not a lot of vacant land left in the Hamptons,” says Nagel, “because of zoning and concerns about water availability. There are restrictions on where you can build, and a lot of farmland has been absorbed by subdivision-type development.” This has led to what he calls “the California syndrome: people buying undervalued property in exclusive locations and removing the structure, and building a new structure to their formula.”

Even in communities that are not on the estate streets but near them, values have exploded. “What you might have paid \$150,000 to \$300,000 for not so long ago now sells for \$1 million to \$4 million. The house is worth nothing—you just knock it down.”

Working with clients on their ideal home, Nagel says, “I’m just a vehicle, here to orchestrate it all, to make sure the client gets exactly what they want. It’s not about imposing my aesthetic.” To this end, he says, “I have it in the con-

tract that a client is to write a narrative, a little story about what their environment is supposed to be like.” This might include “how you wake up in the morning, what kind of music you listen to, are you fanatic in terms of clothes or color sequence?”

After gathering information on the client’s needs and wants, Nagel consults the land and its environs. For example, he says, “If I’m building a breakfast room, I want it on the east side of my house so when the sun rises and I’m having breakfast, I’m like that little cat on the windowsill getting all that nice sun in the morning.”

In the drafting stage, says Nagel, “after the assemblage of things occurs, there’s a lot of sitting back and looking at it and saying ‘how can I sculpt this bunch of unrelated boxes into something that would be architecture?’”

In a current project in Southampton, Nagel is designing the type of home that is cropping up more often: an immense structure of about 12,000 square feet, with twelve bedrooms. With real estate values rapidly increasing, the home becomes a life-long investment. It is what Nagel calls “the mothership, keeping the family together, expanding and becoming a nucleus for the child to come to with their children.”