

Sanctuary For a Chef



Caterer Susan Gage keeps her kitchen, opposite, as serene and devoid of clutter as the rest of the home. The house combines sleekly contemporary lines with a sylvan setting; a quiet boardwalk path, above, winds down toward the nearby Potomac.

There's not even a mouse pad on the ash desktop in Susan Gage's home office in Fort Washington. The keyboard is hidden; the only signs that this is a workplace are the monitor, calculator and phone. Gage flips a wall switch. "See, all my office equipment turns on at once, including the lights," she notes with satisfaction.

It's the same kind of precision and control that Gage maintains in her life and her business, a catering firm that handles upwards of 1,500 events a year. "I don't like a lot of stuff—it pulls me down," says Gage. "Even as a small child I was always seeking peace in our chaotic household."

Her office, converted from a seldom-used screen porch, is glassed in on three sides, creating a natural sylvan mural. In this clean, serene sanctuary, Gage spends every workday morning from 5:30 to 10—with a break for a long run—reviewing every bill and piece of correspondence sent out by her firm, Susan Gage Caterers. Then she's off to the hubbub of the catering facility a few miles away and her 60 full-time employees.

Previously she shared an upstairs office with her husband, Tom, a gastroenterologist. A glimpse into his cluttered space reveals that when it comes to office style, he's yin to her yang.

Architect Heather Cass, of Washington's Cass & Associates, designed the Gages' sleek, contemporary house, set on a rise above an inlet of the Potomac, in 1992. (Four years later, the same firm converted the screen porch into the office.) Susan Gage, a native Oregonian, wanted "a warm, contemporary house, with lots of white and not a lot of natural wood. Her husband liked the hard-edged lines of Le Corbusier and particularly pipe railing." Cass recalls. "This was our challenge: white, pipe railing and warm!" she says with a laugh.

A southern exposure fills the house with light, filtered gently through the leafy canopy. Balconies wrap the house, creating a transition zone between inside and outside, shading and softening the glass and white. Well into the project Cass grew concerned that the busy Gages were not involved enough. "Susan said," Cass recalls, "Don't

Photographs by Thibault Jeanson