



CONTEMPORARY COMFORTS

The renovation of this Fittler Square home was guided by the original design's natural light and open layout.



Jessica Griffin / Staff Photographer

By Terri Akman

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Thanksgiving is a special holiday for Sarah Pierce and Faiz Ahmad, who moved into their 30-year-old Fittler Square rowhouse in April 2020. After a nearly two-year renovation, their home's design — particularly the kitchen — was well-suited to host their Thanksgiving meal.

“Thanksgiving to us is about good food and relaxed time with family,” said Pierce, who teaches at the University of Pennsylvania Carey Law School.

The family, including son Idris, 10, and daughter Rumi, 8, moved from a two-bedroom condo nearby that they had outgrown. They wanted to stay in their Fittler Square neighborhood, and while this house needed updating, it had a lot to offer.

“The house was beautifully designed in the early ’90s with unique architecture and design elements,” said Pierce. “It was important for us to preserve the natural light and open flow of the home, while updating to a contemporary aesthetic.”



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The house was originally built in 1990 by architect John Randolph, who resided there for three decades. Pierce and Ahmad appreciated how solidly the home was built, and they loved its location near the Schuylkill River Park. It also featured outdoor space with a first-floor patio and fourth-floor deck.

“To have a house in the city that has so much natural light and greenery in almost every direction is unusual,” said Ahmad, managing partner of the Wilmington office of Skadden Arps.

After buying the house, the couple took a work trip to France, where they visited a kitchen shop featuring cabinets with very clean lines and sleek, built-in appliances.

“We had never seen anything like that before,” Pierce said. “It inspired us.”



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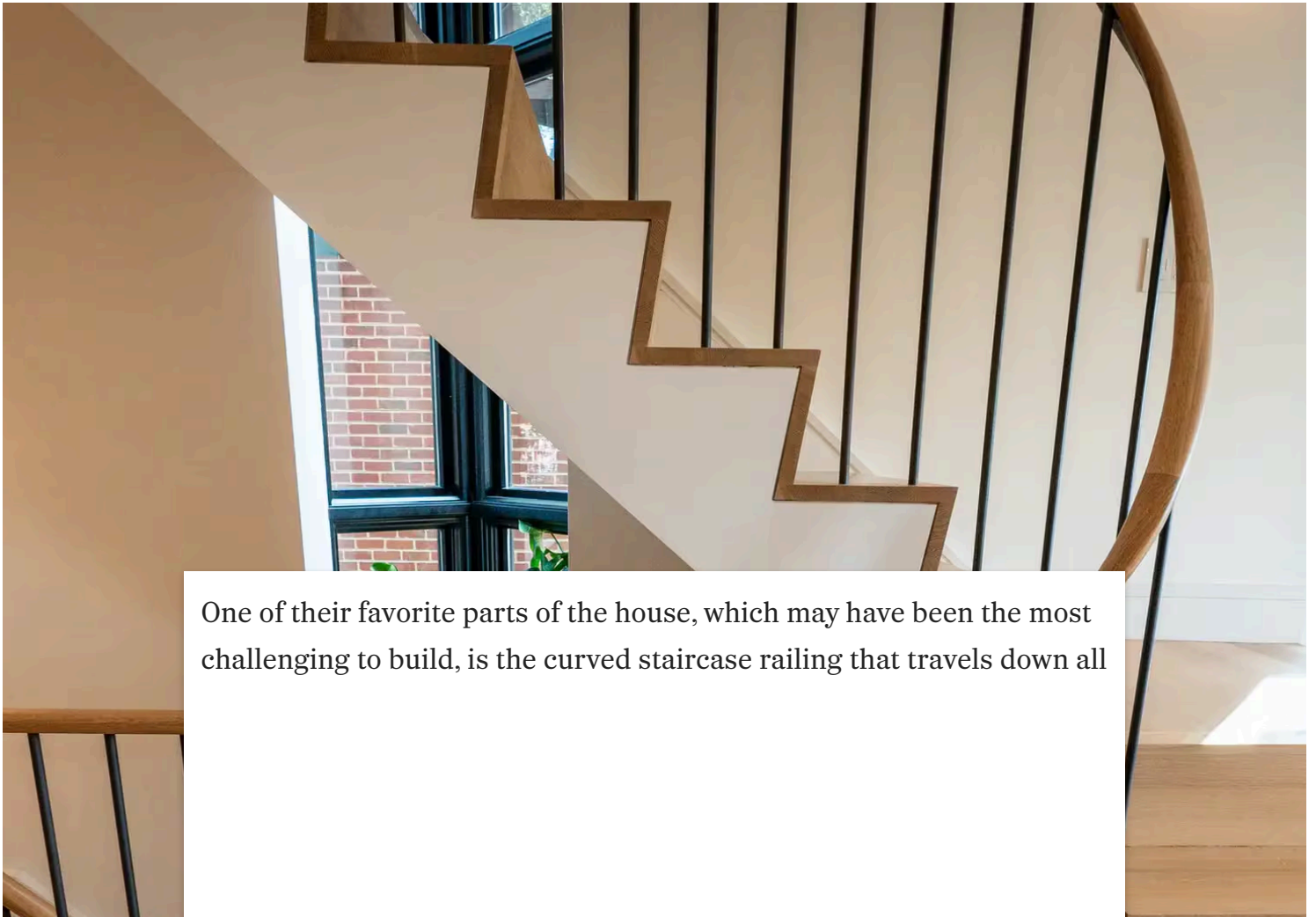
They hired Jason Thompson of [J.Thom Residential Design & Cabinetry](#) in Philadelphia, to create a modern yet cozy home with lots of organized storage space. He outfitted cabinetry where every utensil, pot, pan, and spice had its own home. His vision for the kitchen included an induction cooktop, steam oven, and concealed hood, but Pierce and Ahmad were unsure.

“We invited them to cook a meal at our showroom using our induction cooktop,” recalled Thompson, the Center City showroom’s design director. “After they made breakfast, we discussed at length the benefits.”

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Though they also have a second traditional oven, the pair now use their Wolf steam oven almost exclusively. They find that the food heats up very quickly and feel more nutrients are preserved in the food.

The kitchen was among many renovations they made in the four-story, 3,300-square-foot home, including replacing all 31 windows, installing a new HVAC system, adding a custom built-in desk and shelving to their office, and replacing the roof and flooring.



One of their favorite parts of the house, which may have been the most challenging to build, is the curved staircase railing that travels down all

four floors. At the very top, bright sunlight shines through the fourth-floor skylight.

The renovation included other big challenges. The couple moved into the home just as the world was shutting down due to the pandemic. Then Hurricane Ida hit in 2021.

The front corner of their house is in the 100-year floodplain and water came pouring in from the Schuylkill. But that’s when they discovered how special their neighbors were.

“People we had never met came to help us,” recalled Ahmad. “A guy brought a saw and a bunch of two-by-fours so we could lift our furniture off the ground so it didn’t get ruined.”

A good deal of their artwork was curated by Nicole Calderón, the founder of [Calderón Gallery](#). One of the couple’s favorites, a painting called *Buen Provecho* by Raelis Vasquez, hangs in their second-floor hallway.

Each year, they host Pierce’s family the Wednesday before Thanksgiving. They cook a traditional meal of turkey with all the trimmings, sitting around their large wooden dining room table, from Roche Bobois in Old City.




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After a cozy breakfast, they head down to Ahmad's family in suburban Maryland to enjoy a second Thanksgiving feast. Ahmad's father came to America from India in 1969, with his mom following a few years later. Though his mother cooks Indian fare the rest of the year, Thanksgiving is the one holiday where she goes all in on a traditional American Thanksgiving meal.

"It's her favorite holiday of the year," said Ahmad. "It's purely a holiday about family and eating, and how can you not celebrate that?"

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