

Architectural Digest Artist Vaughn Spann Shares His Picture-Perfect Midcentury Home

By Gay Gassmann, June 23, 2022



Artist Vaughn Spann and family in New Jersey. Max Burkhalter

Spann and his family amplified the aesthetic of this modernist dwelling in New Jersey

Just four years after earning an MFA from Yale, American artist Vaughn Spann is juggling sold out solo shows, endless requests for his work, and a family life that includes three young children. (His eldest child was an infant while Spann was in grad school, so he had a crash course in balancing work and home.) With a practice dedicated to both abstraction and figuration, employing a distinctive technique that involves building up thick layers of paint and mixed media to create highly textured surfaces, Spann is one of the breakout art stars of the past few years. Recently, he also wrapped up a major house renovation.

The family wanted to settle in New Jersey, where both Spann and his wife are from. They were looking for something in the Maplewood area, near relatives and Spann's studio. "We were in our previous place for about three months, and we purchased this place during the summer of 2020," he explains. "We were looking for a modern house, so when we saw the For Sale sign, I was curious. We loved it immediately. Nothing was negotiable, like the crumbling stairs. It was take as is, so we did."

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The modernist house is unique among the grand and spacious historically inspired properties in the neighborhood. Most sit right on the street, whereas this early 1950s house is set back some distance from the curb and so can almost be overlooked. “Actually, we thought it was a much smaller house at first, as one of the trees was blocking the building!” Spann recalls. “Several of our neighbors have said they didn’t even know there was a house here.”

As noted, the five-bedroom, three-bath residence was in need of care. The new homeowners turned to architect Gary Rosard to expand the footprint—enlarging the kitchen, for example—while also taking great care to respect the building’s integrity and original style. “There was carpeting everywhere, which we pulled up, but we kept all the walls, beams, and rooms,” the artist notes. “We just amplified the aesthetic.”

When it comes to the renovation, Spann describes himself as being “OCD,” adding, “We cleared a lot of trees, repaved the driveway, and redid the steps. We bought everything you see in the house. We modified the landscaping a bit, especially in the backyard, which was basically a hill. It’s now a two-tiered garden, so we have lots of outdoor space for the kids.”

What had been a cool brown exterior is now painted a deep charcoal. And the front door went from orange to pink! Spann wanted to make sure the family made the new place their own and added personal touches to make it comfortable and functional for all of them. Plus, there’s plenty of wall space for his growing art collection, which shows up in every room. “I love looking through books about design and architecture,” Spann says. “My go-to is curves, circular, round, and guess what, that’s me being a parent. No hard edges. Very organic and comfortable.”

“I love that our home is as cozy as it is beautiful,” his wife says. “Our kids come home, throw off their shoes, and run to the den, and five minutes later you’ll find them jumping off the knot pillow into their ball pit. It’s literally a beautiful mess.”