

Case Study

Architect Thomas French lets in the light in a spacious Fairfax County pool house



Trade Secrets

FROM THOMAS FRENCH

- Place windows on more than one side of the room so the light can move through the space as the day goes by.
- When deciding whether to install skylights, weigh the thermal gain to the room against the improved aesthetics the skylights will add.
- If a room has too many skylights, use solid doors instead of French doors so that in the heat of summer the room can be closed off if it proves too difficult or expensive to cool.
- Use insulated Simulated Divided Light windows (SDLs); they provide the look of traditional individual panes but actually have permanent muntins attached on the inside and are made out of a solid piece of glass.
- When designing a room plan, always start by positioning the doors, then build the windows around them. Use French doors to bring in more light.

The challenge was to bring in light without roasting the occupants,” says Thomas French of the bright, airy pool house he recently completed in the sought-after enclave of Belle Haven in Northern Virginia. Tapped to create a structure that would mirror the residents’ main house and look at home in their traditional neighborhood, French paid close attention to the placement of windows. The homeowners’ “specific request was that it have a ‘beachy’ character,” says French. “I wanted to draw the light from different directions at different times of day.”

To that end, he suggested that they include a conservatory in the plan, and asked Renaissance Conservatories, a company that specializes in these spaces, to do the job. The result is a two-bedroom cottage with a kitchenette, a large main gathering area with vaulted ceilings and dormers, and the adjoining conservatory, which is designed in the manner of an English conservatory and functions as a morning room and garden space. Architectural-grade windows abound throughout the house in an array of different styles, including skylights, casements and transoms. French doors bring in even more light, while offering access to the pool and the picturesque surrounding landscape.

ARCHITECTURE: Thomas French, AIA, Thomas French Architect PC, McLean, Virginia. CONTRACTOR: BOWA Builders, Inc., McLean, Virginia. CONSERVATORY DESIGN & CONSTRUCTION: Renaissance Conservatories, Leola, Pennsylvania. PHOTOGRAPHY: Lydia Cutter.