



"We keep expecting to look out and see giraffes and elephants," Mark Bisnow says.

# Almost Always Entertaining

THE BISNOWS SHARE THE INSPIRATION FOR THEIR OUTDOOR SANCTUARY

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During recent renovations to their circa 1935 French Provincial home in Northwest DC, Mark Bisnow and Margot Machol extended the deck into the trees. This gives them more entertaining space and takes advantage of their wooded terrain.



When Mark Bisnow isn't working on highly crafted e-newsletters, he's at home with wife Margot Machol and sons Elliott and Austin enjoying their one-of-a-kind outdoor sanctuary nestled in the treetops of DC's Forest Hills.

Built 25' above the ground, the series of octagonal decks connected by bridges that ultimately lead to the

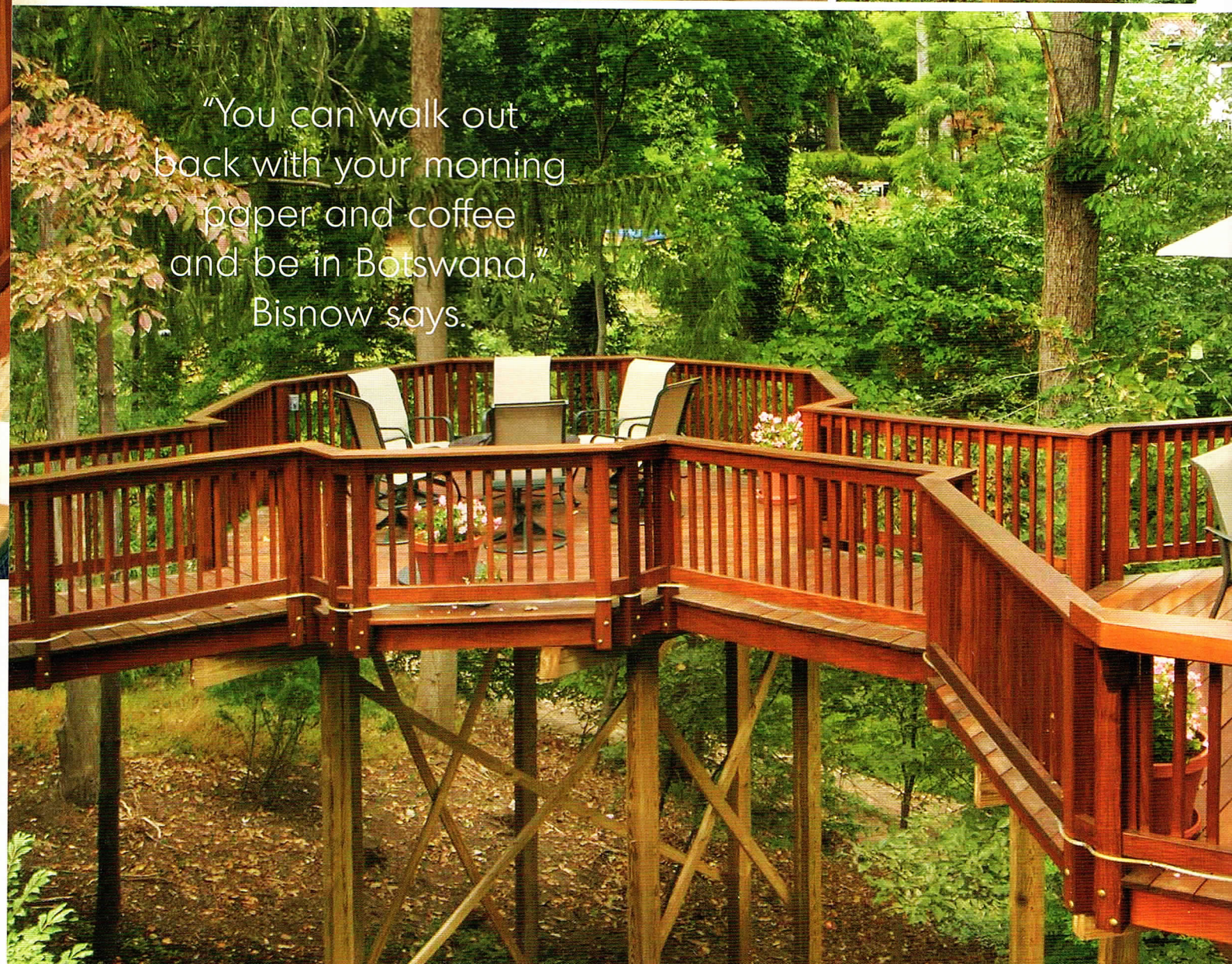
pool, hot tub, and outdoor kitchen were inspired by camps they visited while in Botswana in 2005. "I love this whole concept of connecting circles," Machol says. "We were trying to get maximum deck space along with privacy," Bisnow adds.

What they achieved is a fantastic deck design that fits their lifestyle, maybe even mirrors their interesting careers, and certainly says they're a family who loves to have fun.





"You can walk out  
back with your morning  
paper and coffee  
and be in Botswana,"  
Bisnow says.





## Almost Africa

The camps in Botswana are built high above the ground to keep out the wildlife. While wildlife is welcome in the Bisnows' Northwest DC yard, it was the terrain that proved challenging and required the decking to soar 25' above a 10-acre ravine along Rock Creek Park.

Initially working with David Cumins Mitchell Architect for conceptual drawings of the deck, the homeowners turned to Thomas Redding, president of Thomas Designs and Construction Inc., to fine-tune the design to accommodate the backyard amenities. After living in the home for more than 20 years, the Bisnows decided they were there to stay, at least for a while longer, and wanted to capitalize on the wooded, hillside setting.

At first, Redding thought he might be able to salvage some of the existing redwood deck's infrastructure, but discovered that much of the original deck needed to be replaced. This was one of the surprises uncovered during renovations. "The footings were the

biggest challenge," adds Redding, who divided his time between the construction on the home, which was an expansion of the entire back, and the redesign of the deck.

Geometric shapes and connecting bridges cascading above a ravine all sounded like wonderful ideas, but they were difficult to picture until it was complete. "The deck is so high up, you feel like you're in the middle of the forest," says Machol, a former White House aide who is now staff director of a commission reviewing foreign aid. "It's like you're in a tree house."

"You're almost at the top of some trees," Bisnow adds. Bisnow, who has worked as a presidential campaign advisor, general counsel, and radio host, is now enjoying himself as founder and CEO of Bisnow on Business, which produces daily e-newsletters about local businesses. Just like the Bisnow on Business mantra – (almost) Never Boring, the deck is almost always a place for fun. **ws**



OPPOSITE FROM TOP LEFT: Because the Bisnows love the location of their home and the privacy of the yard, they decided to renovate the home to meet their needs and also redesign the deck using Brazilian Ipe in a natural stain. The deck construction was challenging because of its height and intricate design. Interconnecting paths lead to octagonal platforms on the outskirts of the main patio.

ABOVE LEFT: Homeowners Mark Bisnow, left, and Margot Machol enjoy an evening on the deck with builder Thomas Redding.



LEFT: This image of a Botswanan camp taken by the Bisnows during a trip there in 2005 inspired them to create this treetop oasis.

### RESOURCES

■ **David Cumins Mitchell Architect**  
202.363.3200

■ **Thomas Designs and Construction Inc.**  
703.752.1614  
thomas-designs.com