

Civilized Approach

Clever architecture blurs the boundaries between public and private space, producing a unique home with a distinct point of view near downtown Atlanta.

A handmade French walnut table anchors the dining space in Pam Sessions and Don Donnelly's Atlanta home. Chairs upholstered in golden raw silk reflect the sunshine that floods in through floor-to-ceiling windows.



The confluence of several busy

streets is an unusual place to find a private home. But the challenge of creating a family residence in a civic area is exactly what appealed to Don Donnelly and builder Pam Sessions about a small, sloped property poised between the charm of Atlanta's historical Buckhead district and the modernity of the city's high-rise office buildings.

Building designer Lew Oliver understood the couple's desire for a singular home, and he delivered with an adaptation of a brick Roman Revival that passersby commonly mistake for a civic monument. Borrowing elements from ancient Italian architecture, Oliver created a long, narrow home that mimics a temple in form.

At about 3,000 square feet, the home isn't large, but it's full of function. The upside-down design positions the home's public areas on the top level to take advantage of the views; the private

rooms are located on the ground level. Echoing the style of an old ballroom, the top level is a single large room, but it serves multiple functions, and each area has its own sense of place. A 14-foot-high cove ceiling and tall windows define the living/dining area. A fireplace anchors the living area and creates a spot for conversation; it also separates the lofty space from a more intimate study and television room. At the opposite end, the space makes a slight L to the kitchen, where the ceiling height drops to about 10 feet. "There's a nice balance, with the kitchen appearing slightly tucked away," Pam says.

Plaster walls add a classic finish to the space and reference the solidity of an old building. Oliver picked up on that theme in the ground-level bedrooms by covering the walls with 1x8 tongue-and-groove planking. "When people see it, they're so delighted with the texture and the look that they forget the rooms aren't large," Oliver says. "It turns a small space into an asset, and it's a very durable material that will take on a patina. When that happens, it will give the home a sense of history."

Interior designer Janie Hirsch enhanced the notion of an established home by flanking windows with generous folds of silk and upholstering classic chair silhouettes in touchable velvets and linens. Overscale pieces of artwork showcasing contemporary motifs add modern zing to the otherwise traditionally styled rooms. "It was important that our home be as comfortable for a large party or intimate dinner as it is for the most casual times with just our family," Pam says.

Repeating materials throughout the house creates the illusion of a larger space. Tall, uniform windows enhance the effect so that Pam and Don have never felt they lacked for room. "I'd much rather spend time in a room I truly love and use than to move within a home from place to place if those places don't delight me," Pam says.



This photo: Gray silk curtains frame a doorway that subtly separates a formal living area from a casual television room. **Opposite:** The nature of its location at a busy intersection gives the house a larger-than-life prominence. "I wanted to do an iconic building so the home is more of a civic expression than a residential one," building designer Lew Oliver says.



Clever furniture arrangement allows guests to flow freely around the combination living/dining area and out onto wraparound balconies. Strategically placed sconces accentuate the crown molding and tall ceiling. Ceiling lights were kept to a minimum to keep sight lines open throughout the house.







“A design needs to meet your lifestyle rather than forcing it to accommodate conventional wisdom.”

—HOMEOWNER AND BUILDER PAM SESSIONS



Opposite: A freestanding tub, marble flooring, and white-tile walls pamper the master bath. “We wanted to give it a modern edge,” interior designer Janie Hirsch says. **Left:** In the kitchen, an oversize island sets the stage for entertaining. Its deep counter is a handy buffet and buffers guests from the nitty-gritty of cooking and catering. Housing the sink, dishwasher, and microwave, the island also establishes a convenient work zone, with the range directly across from the sink. **Below:** The master suite, with its glamorous winged headboard, exemplifies Pam’s overall approach to scaling back on size but not on luxurious appointments.

