

ON LOCATION

## In Atlanta, a Major Renovation Without a Major Investment

To turn a dated house into a family home, a designer used budget-friendly tactics, salvaging existing materials and customizing bargain furniture.



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By Tim McKeough

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Scott and Jessica Davis have never managed to stay in one place for long, and with every move, they have found a home with a distinct style.

“We lived in a co-op in Brooklyn, then a Tudor house in L.A., then a Dutch colonial in New Jersey, and then, prior to this, an 1879 Victorian that had turrets,” said Ms. Davis, 41, an interior designer who founded [Atelier Davis](#) and the hardware company [Nest Studio](#). But despite owning residences with various historical designs, she said, “my personal style veers a little more modern.”

So in the fall of 2018, when the couple realized they would need to move their family once more, from South Orange, N.J., to Atlanta, for Mr. Davis’s work in management consulting, they were determined to find something with cleaner lines, plenty of glass and a strong indoor-outdoor connection.

Just as they were beginning their search, Mr. Davis, who was making a weekly commute to Atlanta, discovered one such home almost by accident. While they were still trying to decide which neighborhood they wanted to live in, Mr. Davis saw a single-story, 3,000-square-foot house on two wooded acres in Buckhead, designed by the architect Jerry Cooper in 1960.

“I was just immediately taken by the big, open, airy space,” said Mr. Davis, 42. “And I could feel nature on both sides of the house with these big windows. It just felt good.”

At Mr. Davis’s urging, Ms. Davis flew down and immediately fell in love, too. Yes, the kitchen and bathrooms were dated, the wall-to-wall carpets would need to go, and the finishes generally needed to be refreshed, but the Davises had experience tackling big projects, and the bones were just what they were looking for.

“We felt like we had to jump on it,” Ms. Davis said, so they quickly struck a deal to buy it for \$950,000 and closed that November.

The upshot of getting the keys a few months earlier than expected was that it gave them more time to complete the renovation. With help from [David Obuchowski](#), an architect who was a neighbor in South Orange, Ms. Davis began planning a project that preserved much of what was there, but with a few big changes.

One of the biggest was opening up the kitchen, which, as in so many houses of the period, was a cramped affair largely sealed off from the rest of house. To connect it to the dining room and a small study, they knocked down walls and installed steel I-beams to carry the weight of the roof.

They salvaged the original magnolia-wood paneling from the demolished walls and repurposed it as cladding for the new pantry. To bring more light into the space, they added a skylight directly above a new island with a Dekton counter and knurled-brass legs. They replaced the ceramic floor tile with terrazzo.

There were other problems with spatial flow. One wing where they wanted to create bedrooms for their children, Lucy, now 5, and Bryan, 8, felt cut off from rest of the house, so they took down more walls to create a hallway that provides a logical connection to the master suite, lining it with storage units to hold the children’s belongings.

Two compact bedrooms off the hallway are equipped with inexpensive loft beds that Ms. Davis bought on Amazon and customized by adding plywood cladding that turned them into forts.

For simple, forgiving flooring in the children’s rooms and a home office, Ms. Davis replaced the old carpet with cork. In the master bedroom, she simply removed the carpet and covered the plywood subfloor with graphite-colored Annie Sloan Chalk Paint, which she topped with the company’s clear matte lacquer for durability.

In most places, she painted the original dust- and orange-colored brick white, and the structural posts and ceiling beams Benjamin Moore’s Black Forest Green. She continued the deep gray-green hue on the outside of the house, with the exception of the front doors, which she painted peach.

The work began in January 2019 and took about six months to complete, at a cost of roughly \$175,000. The Davises moved in last July and are now in the process of making some changes to the surrounding landscape.

But it already has the feeling of home — which has been particularly comforting during the coronavirus pandemic. “It’s definitely an oasis,” Mr. Davis said, noting that all the trees give the property the feeling of a remote getaway, even though it is just a few miles outside Atlanta’s city center. “We’ve really been lucky to have the houses that we’ve had, but this one feels the most like us.”

“It’s a great house to live in, because there’s so much light, yet also so much privacy,” Ms. Davis added. “Especially being struck at home, it’s nice to be able to look out and see nature.”

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