

Itsy bitsy beauty: Woman enchanted by fairy garden. 9E.

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# Home & Garden



**Step into past:** Durham historical homes tour visits "Bull Durham" and "Rice Diet" homes. PAGE 5E

## home of the month

May's profile of a well-designed living space

See many more photos of this house and other Home of the Month entries online at [www.newsobserver.com](http://www.newsobserver.com), key word: **architectural**. Next month's home: Ashburton Road.



### the interior

Thanks to the tall ceiling in the living area, this 1,070-foot Habitat for Humanity house seems larger than it actually is. The integrated living and dining space makes for remarkable openness. The design's split roofline maximizes the benefits of careful solar orientation and passive "stack effect" cooling, a system that draws cool breezes into the house through south facing windows and forces warm air out of the house through the north facing clerestory windows, accessible by ladder. "I don't have to use too much air conditioning in the summer," homeowner Stephanie Davis said.

# stacked in favor

BY GEOFFREY BARTON  
GUEST COLUMNIST

Today's Home of the Month is reviewed by Geoffrey Barton, a master of architecture graduate student at N.C. State University's College of Design. Home of the Month, a collaboration with the College of Design, shows possibilities in constructing a living space that's well thought-out and built with the homeowners' living patterns and preferences in mind. Each month we'll profile a new home, selected by an expert panel from designs by area architects. The goal: to offer inspiration and knowledge that can be applied to any living space.

While issues of site, environmental impact and neighborhood context confront any residential architect, none of these ingredients mean much if the resulting design does not please its owners. Personal satisfaction is perhaps the strongest force behind the architecture of a single-family house.

Here's a story of a collaboration between architect and owner who worked side by side to build this uniquely crafted home.

Architect Erik Van Mehlman, AIA, and his wife, designer Anna Marich, Associate AIA, created the Davis Res-

idence in Raleigh in 2003 as part of a competition sponsored by the American Institute of Architects Triangle Young Architects Forum and Habitat for Humanity of Wake County. The contest challenged young designers to create an affordable house that would satisfy the strict Habitat guidelines, while generating new ideas for affordable housing.

The design features an innovative plan and split roofline that maximizes the benefits of careful solar orientation and passive "stack effect" cooling,

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### the davis residence



**Architect** | Erik Van Mehlman, Architect  
**Project location** | Raleigh  
**Beds/baths** | 3/2  
**Heated square footage** | 1,070  
**Cost** | From about \$120,000 to \$170,000 depending upon the location  
**Key design concept** | Affordability, passive thermal comfort

### the panel

"Affordability with a twist." The panel applauded the Habitat for Humanity home's compact design, innovative solutions and architect Erik Mehlman's ability to give the house its "own personality." The house was built by a small crew of volunteers with Habitat for Humanity.



**PROJECT CREDITS** | ARCHITECT: ERIK VAN MEHLMAN | ARCHITECTDESIGNERS: ERIK MEHLMAN, AIA AND ANNA MARICH | ASSOC. AIA GENERAL CONTRACTOR: HABITAT FOR HUMANITY OF WAKE COUNTY | NCCONSTRUCTION MANAGER: CHUCK DOPLER, HABITAT FOR HUMANITY OF WAKE COUNTY | NCCONSTRUCTION LEADER: WALT LEWIS, LEWIS HOMES LLC | CONCRETE KITCHEN COUNTER: MELD USA - MICHAEL AND PETER BUSTIN | PHOTOGRAPHER: MATTHEW KESTERSON



## Burning love

BY L.A. JACKSON  
CORRESPONDENT

Call Aaron Hydrick a hothead, if you want. He has been singed and scorched, but, like a moth to a flame, he is drawn into the fiery world of chile peppers.

This is quite different from the 8-year-old boy who thought regular Slim Jims were way too spicy. Hydrick's pepper epiphany came when he was a college student and his brother invited him to have some pizza. "He asked if I wanted some pickled jalapeño peppers on mine," Hydrick recalls. "I decided to give it a try, and to my surprise, it was pretty good!"

Later, when Hydrick was in the Navy, he began to refine his tastes and explore the many possibilities of chile peppers. He even developed his own hot sauce, which he called "Primary Coolant" — a sizzling salute to his occupational specialty as a nuclear reactor operator on a Navy submarine.

Now a graduate student at N.C. State University, Hydrick has channeled his adoration for chile peppers into becoming a pretty good gardener. Faced with little space for growing the plants (Hydrick lives in an apartment), he has picked up some smart gardening techniques to get the most out of his peppers.

"I'll garden anywhere someone will lend me the space," says Hydrick, who plants his peppers in pots and on borrowed land. Last year, longtime friend Richard Willis of Cary let him cultivate 115 square feet of backyard space. From this small area, and from additional peppers he grew in pots, Hydrick tended 100 plants.

So far, Hydrick says, he has tried 35 different varieties. If this seems like a lot, he compares it to the 150 or so varieties the Chile Pepper Institute at New Mexico State University evaluates each year.

### MORE INSIDE

**THE SCORCH FACTOR** | A rundown of the heat some peppers can bring

**HOT GARDEN** | Keep your backyard spicy by growing peppers

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SEE PEPPERS, PAGE 14E



Aaron Hydrick grows his own peppers for hot sauces and keeps dried peppers on hand to grind over food and use in sauces.

STAFF PHOTO BY LISA LAUCK

**HYDRICK'S PICKS** | See the local grower's favorite peppers to plant at [www.newsobserver.com](http://www.newsobserver.com), keyword **homegarden**

Enter our summer contest!



If you don't know by now that small can be beautiful, then you have been living in a closet — a very tiny closet with no HGTV.

New Yorkers have the art down to a science. Surely, some Triangle residents out there know the deal. If you are renting a small space of about 1,200 square feet or less — be it an apartment, condo or even someone's garage — and have managed to fit some serious style into your diminutive digs, we want you.

Show us what you've done to your little abode. Send photos and details of your design to [homeandgarden@newsobserver.com](mailto:homeandgarden@newsobserver.com) or 215 S. McDowell St., Raleigh, NC 27601. Be sure to include daytime contact information. We'll choose the favorites and show them off in a future story. (For an idea of what we are looking for, check out the hot new site [ApartmentTherapy.com](http://ApartmentTherapy.com).)

# stacked in favor

## DAVIS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1E

a system that draws cool breezes into the house through south facing windows and forces warm air out through north facing clerestory windows.

The easily achieved features are unusual in the general housing market, much less in an affordable house. In recognizing the Davis Residence, the Home of the Month selection panel said it "transcends affordability."

As a Habitat house, the design was required to have three bedrooms, two full baths, kitchen, living area and a dining space, all within a floor plan of about 1,070 square feet. Mehlman remembers that early ideas for the house came when he noticed that the kitchens of most affordable houses were tucked away in a corner. "I wondered what would happen if you placed the kitchen at the center," Mehlman said.

What happens is a refreshingly open plan. Rather than a generic corridor connecting the bedrooms, entrances to the bedrooms are smartly tucked off the open living area. This not only ensures privacy, but also guarantees that no space is lost to circulation. The house's compact design also makes efficient use of square footage by placing storage and laundry space between bedrooms to serve as sound insulators.

The integrated living and dining space has remarkable openness. Its tall ceiling makes the house seem larger than it actually is. "Although the house is one of the smallest in the development, the volume provided in the living and dining areas draws regular commentary that the house is larger than the others on site," Mehlman said.

The success of the cooling system design feature became evident during construction. Homeowner Stephanie Davis

remembers that unlike crews at other houses in the neighborhood, volunteers at her house took their lunch break inside. Even before the air-conditioning system had been installed, the Davis living room stayed cool and pleasant.

Working alongside the Davises during construction (part of Habitat for Humanity's policy is that future owners must put in a certain number of "sweat equity" hours to qualify for a Habitat house) was the most rewarding part of the project for Mehlman. It allowed him to learn things about the family that influenced his design choices. Davis' allergies led him to search for an alternative to carpeting — a donation of attractive hardwood laminate floor. The addition of donated concrete countertops helped to distinguish the house as one that was not cheaply built, but built for cheap.

These details, along with the clean and functional plan, make this home stand out as one that is well-designed and well-crafted. The Davis Residence would be a strong focal point in any neighborhood, but here, in a new development among other Habitat houses, it serves as a showcase of what standard construction can do when considered as part of an integrated design scheme. Following Habitat guidelines that all materials of the exterior must be virtually maintenance free, the common materials help the house blend in with its neighbors, while remaining distinctive.

If every new house were as carefully considered as the Davis Residence, the faceless speculative housing market would be mollified by an alternative mode, one that considers the lasting satisfaction of creating a house that is as unique as the family that calls it home.

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## the exterior

Notice how the diagonal stairs create a sort of triangular funnel that pulls the eye toward the front door. Vertical windows and a brown windowless section (brown siding that's vertically placed) helps to break up the regularity of the front of the cream-colored house. By extending the footers, the architect was able to jut the windowless area (where the bathroom is located) out from the house. This allows a private space to be placed on the public facade of the house. The same approach, which also creates a few extra square feet of floor space, is repeated along the north side of the house where storage closets separate bedrooms.

While it may not carry broad appeal, this is one of the more interesting details to architects because it shows how the home's inside is broken up. It also is an interesting way of expressing the function of the building on the exterior while maintaining privacy. It addresses an issue that has challenged many architects for centuries — does the outer skin of the building need to necessarily reveal the contents of the building?



## the roof

The roof on the house is not a standard pitched roof. Architect Erik Van Mehlman wanted it to appear as if it were a massive wedge shaped object (rather than just a two-dimensional slanted surface) that is split into two halves. Most homes have roofs that are plopped on top of the wall frame.

Here, shingles are applied to the side of the roof wedge so that the wedge looks like a heavy object rather than just a flimsy protective layer.

The custom porch columns (built by Mehlman) are cut away to appear as though they aren't there to support the roof. The result is a roof with more of a prominent, heavy presence over the porch.

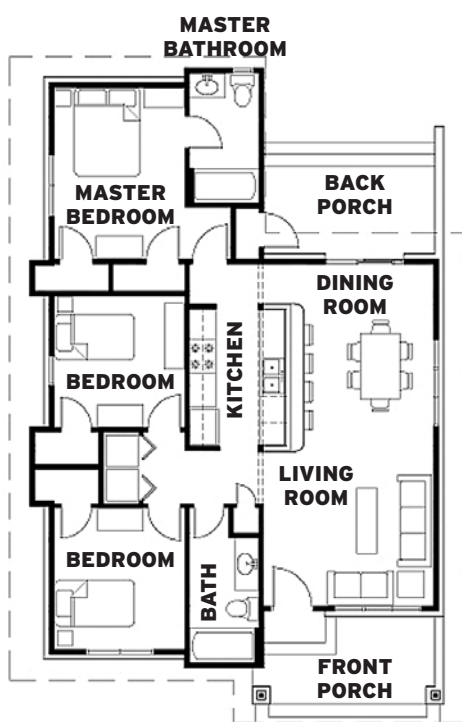


## the plans

An architectural drawing illustrates how the south side of the house — living, dining and kitchen — all become extensions of the same space with few walls between them, as opposed to the compartmentalized private spaces of the north side with several walls.

Placing the kitchen in the center of the house allowed Mehlman to be more flexible in the arrangement of rooms. Had the kitchen been placed in one corner of the house (like most Habitat house designs), a longer corridor would have been necessary to retain the privacy of the bedrooms.

"The design sat in the Habitat office for about a year. No one wanted it," said architect Mehlman. The homeowner told him she selected the design because "she could see herself in the space."



## the family

Homeowner Stephanie Davis, a human resource manager at Wal-Mart Distribution Center in Henderson, who shares the home with her two daughters Kristen, 13, and Kaycee, 2, said she selected the Mehlman design because "I liked the living area, it was so open. It was just important for me to be able to see and be with my kids while in the kitchen or other parts of the house."

Davis had helped to build other Habitat homes as a requirement for future ownership so she had seen other floorplans. "(Habitat) had 4 or 5 models, but you go to one neighborhood then another and there's the same house. I like having something different."

## architect's aim

"The design started with how to centralize a kitchen in a 1,000 square foot plan. We were trying to work within the realm of affordability and develop a unique and better product," Erick Mehlman said.

Weta Ray Clark contributed to this story.