

# home<sup>N</sup> of the<sup>N</sup> month

July's profile of a well-designed space

## Form and function intersect

Today's Home of the Month is reviewed by Kristen Schaffer, a professor of architectural and urban history 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 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.

BY KRISTEN SCHAFER

GUEST COLUMNIST

**M**eredith Davis wanted a house that was a reflection of her life and work — seamless.

When the graphic designer is working in her home office, she wants to be able to hear whether something is boiling on the stove.

"I knew what I wanted in a house," said Davis, who had thought a lot about her needs and preferences, and how she wanted her house to function.

Davis had been talking about a new house for years with Georgia Bizios, a friend and colleague on the faculty of the College of Design at N.C. State, as well as owner of Bizios Architect. Finally tiring of the maintenance on her older house and the closeness of her neighbors, Davis hired Bizios to design her a house. She found a site in North Raleigh in an established neighborhood.

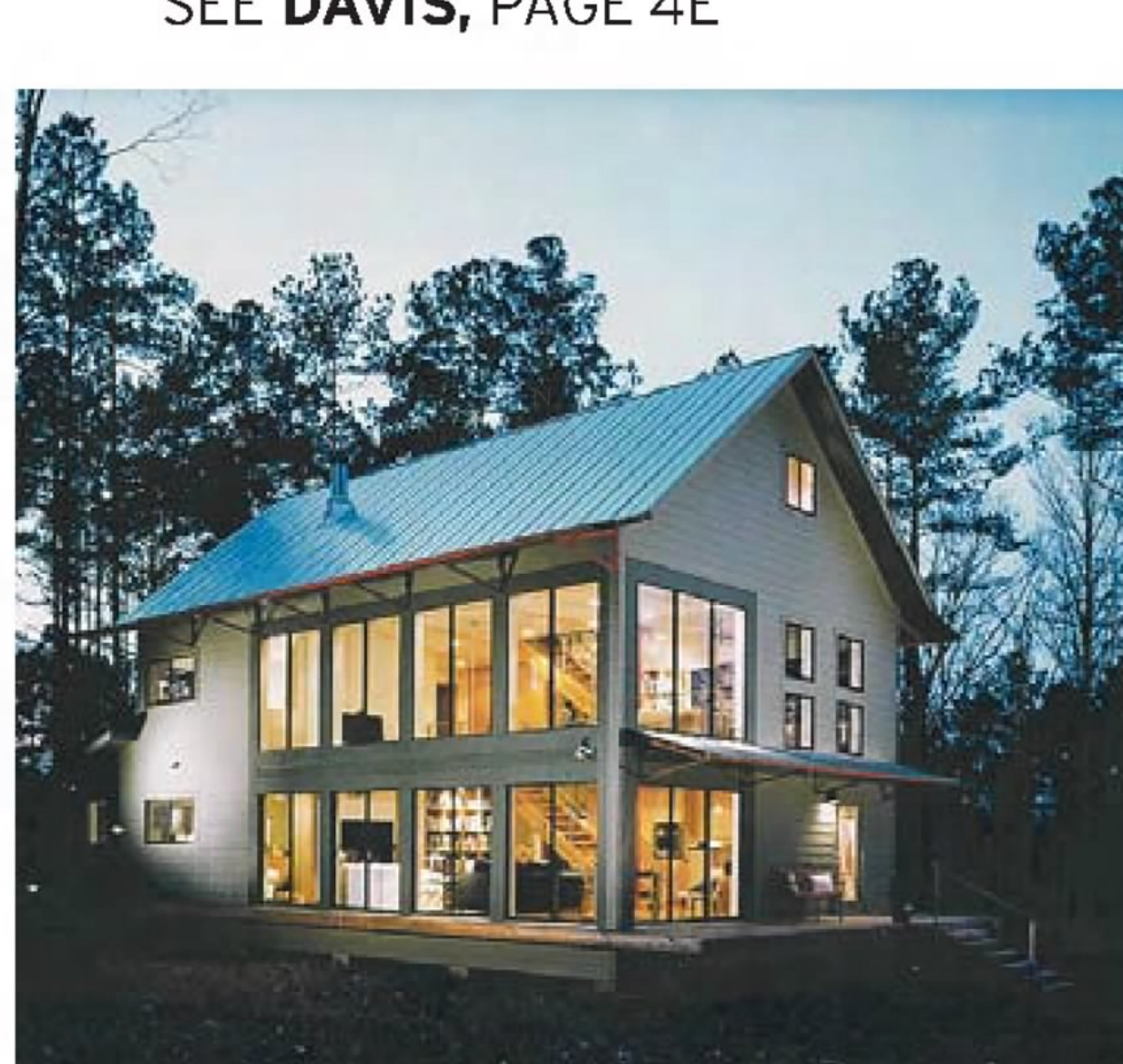
The Davis Residence is a work of contemporary architecture rooted in local vernacular building. Vernacular architecture is sometimes defined as the home-grown or garden variety architecture of the past. It can provide inspiration for contemporary architects. Bizios' designs typically use the pitched roof that signifies home to most people, but with a more modern, open, interior that responds to the way many prefer to live today. With its simple, legible forms and minimal approach to detail, the vernacular is also a good source of inspiration for a house on a tight budget.

The traditional forms of the Davis house are clad with new, low-maintenance versions of older materials. The low-key exterior gives way to

### DESIGN CALL

Architects: We are searching for next year's designs. Get details on page **4E**.

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## the project

### Davis Residence

**Architect:** Bizios Architect

**Project location:** Raleigh

**Beds/Bath:** 2/2

**Completed:** 2002

**Heated square footage:** 2,000

**Unheated square footage:** 440 (decks)

**Key design concept:** Contemporary vernacular, simple form and open living.

**Cost:** Unavailable

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



## DAVIS

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a dramatic, two-story, light-filled modern interior, designed around the homeowner's needs. Numerous large windows bring the outside in, while a platform and deck extend the inside out. "We appreciated the vernacular form with (its) modern gesture," said the Home of the Month panel.

To help in the design, Bizios had Davis complete a detailed questionnaire — more than 30 pages — to draw out even minute details of Davis' living priorities and needs. "My clients accuse me of giving them homework," Bizios laughed.

The questionnaire focuses on the uses and qualities of rooms. Some questions are specific, asking the dimensions of the dining table and the number and kind of kitchen appliances. Even the needs of Winnie, Davis' socially challenged dog, were queried.

Other questions are expansive. One asks about the fond memories of particular places and favorite childhood spaces. For those with imagination or strong images of powerful spatial experiences, the question can be potent. It caused Davis to recall her fascination with state park pavilions — their airiness, expansive floors and high ceilings, as well as the open, screened, summer camp cabins of her youth.

That Davis would respond so vividly should come as no surprise. Philosophers such as Gaston Bachelard have written about how much our sense of home and spatial preferences are formed in childhood. On the questionnaire, a quote from Bachelard cites the chief benefit of a house as he sees it: "the house shelters daydreaming." Such a feature is something that developers' so-called "custom homes" cannot even come close to addressing.

When Bizios asked Davis what she wanted the house to look like, Davis knew immediately. She wanted it to feel like it belonged in North Carolina. She also wanted its design to recall, but not copy, regional vernacular buildings. One vernacular building type — raised off the ground, with a main gabled roof, secondary shed roofs, and large overhangs — was a model appropriate to the climate, and it fit Davis' budget restrictions.

With vernacular architecture, details are simplified and cost-effective. For instance, the raising of the house on piers allows the air to circulate, and not building a wall

around the crawl space reduces costs. Other cost-cutting alternatives developed from continued conversations between Davis and the architect. For example, Davis had initially wanted a garage but it brought the project over budget. When Bizios pursued the topic, it came out that Davis wanted the garage mostly for storage. A revised design offered the attic as an alternative, replacing the attic ladder and hatch with a full-size stair and door. The insulation for the second floor ceiling was relocated to the roof. A carport was designed for construction later, when the client's budget allowed, as was an expanded deck. It was a good compromise, as such additions to the exterior would not be as disruptive as later alterations to the interior, Bizios said.

Bizios placed large windows and the major living spaces — the living and dining areas — on the long side of the house, facing the south to get maximum light. The northern and western sides have small windows, protecting the interior from the hot western sun. A careful clearing of the one-acre site left plenty of shade trees, giving Davis the country retreat feel that she sought.

A liberating aspect of the building process was that Davis and Bizios were not focused on resale value. Davis decided on the basis of what was best for her. "I tell my clients that you get the best results when you keep it simple, functional and to your liking," Bizios said.

The materials and details of the interior are simple, not faddish. For example, one single color of ceramic tile was used on both bathroom floors and on the walls. Even the fireplace surround is made of floor tiles — in black. Other materials include wood (on the floors) and laminate (countertops).

Davis got what she wanted: A house with an understated exterior that contributes to the sense of place. A house with an open, spacious, dramatic interior with no corridors, lots of storage and ample light. A house that fills with moonlight and feels like summer camp. A fun house that is great for parties. A functional work space overlooking a lofty room.

It's a house for living and working seamlessly, where, from her desk, Davis can hear what is boiling on the stove.

Guest columnist Kristen Schaffner, Ph.D., can be reached at [homeandgarden@newsobserver.com](mailto:homeandgarden@newsobserver.com).

### ARCHITECTS: A DESIGN CALL

With just a few more Home of the Month profiles left for 2006, we are starting our search for house designs to feature in 2007. Registered architects practicing in North Carolina are invited to submit designs completed since Jan. 1, 2001. The single family house designs can be for new construction or a major renovation or an addition. The designs should demonstrate quality use of space, affordability, new ideas, as well as solutions for real living issues. A panel of architects and architectural critics will select the top designs that we'll feature next year. Registration deadline is Oct. 2. Entry submission deadline is Nov. 1. For details and forms, visit [www.design.ncsu.edu](http://www.design.ncsu.edu) and click on the Home of the Month icon. Or send e-mail to [homeofthemonth@ncsu.edu](mailto:homeofthemonth@ncsu.edu).



### interior

The main living area of the house is a light-filled, two-story space. A screened-in porch is unnecessary when — with the sliding doors open — the whole house feels like one, says homeowner Meredith Davis.



### architect's aim

"We wanted a simple plan without any corridors, where every room opened to other rooms. It also was important that materials used were low maintenance."



Bizios

### the stairs

The client's galleylike office is to the left on the second floor. Storage is built in on the north wall from the office to the kitchen below. The sitting area just beyond the stairs has a treehouse feel and is a favorite spot of guests during large parties.



### fireplace

The fireplace and flanking folding panels separate the bedroom from the living area. Above are windowlike openings to the second-floor guest room. The dying embers of a fire, begun for living room enjoyment, can be enjoyed from the bedroom. The double-sided fireplace was homeowner Davis' idea.



### exterior

The use of just three types of windows contributes to the simplicity of the house and helped architect Georgia Bizios stay within the budget. The house is painted a single color, and is clad with low-maintenance cementitious fiber boards that resemble traditional clapboards.

PROJECT CREDITS: GENERAL CONTRACTOR: DAVID ROBERTS CONSTRUCTION; PHOTOGRAPHY: JAY MANGUM; BIZIOS ARCHITECT