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Home & Garden



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home of the month

June's profile of a well-designed living space

See more photos of this house and other Home of the Month entries online at www.newsobserver.com.

key word: **architectural**. Next month's home: The Davis Residence



clean split

BY JESSICA JOHNSON AND WETA RAY CLARK
GUEST COLUMNIST HOME AND GARDEN EDITOR

Today's Home of the Month is reviewed by Jessica Johnson, a visiting assistant professor 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 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.

the story of the Webb Dotti House starts like most architect-designed homes. Frustrated with the house options available to them, Francesca Dotti and Frank Webb decided to find a lot and build a house themselves. Having collected clippings from magazines for a long time, they had an impressively clear idea of what they wanted in a home.

What they wanted was a courtyard residence. What they ended up with was a sophisticated, modern home comfortably tucked into a wooded Chapel Hill hillside. Cleaved and then sheared, the house opens up to two outdoor spaces — a garden terrace to the south and an automobile court to the north.

It's not quite a true courtyard home, where the house wraps around an outside terrace, but Dotti and Webb are not complaining.

"We asked for a courtyard and that's what we got," says homeowner Frank Webb. "We are delighted with everything. ...We produced about four pages of notes to [architect Francisco Gomes] about what we wanted. If you put all the notes together it would have produced almost something that we couldn't have afforded. But Francisco was able to come up with a design that was affordable and met our needs."

Working with a sloping and not-so-deep lot, plus pages of ideas from the homeowners, Gomes and Dabney Staub of Gomes + Staub Architects came up with a design that divides the house into two sections, splitting what might have been a single rectangular plan into two parts and then shifting the halves slightly apart. The result is two volumes, or blocks, of living spaces and a sunny terrace to the south.

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the project

webb dotti house

Architect | Gomes + Staub
Project location | Chapel Hill
Beds/Baths | 3-2½
Completed | May 2003
Square footage | 2,580
Cost | Unavailable
Key design concept | Site specific, outdoor garden terrace, homeowner-architect collaboration

exterior

Tucked into sloping ground, the Webb Dotti House is divided into two sections, or volumes, and then shifted slightly apart.

A glass vestibule joins the two halves. A small terrace extends a welcome to visitors at the main entrance, where a tall alcove offers shelter.

vestibule

Exterior materials, such as the concrete floors and cypress siding, continue into the vestibule, creating a smooth transition as you move inside. A cantilevered slate ledge near the door provides a convenient spot for keys. It's a small, but very useful, detail that came out of the close working relationship between the architects, contractor and clients. Says architect Gomes: "Rather than have a piece of furniture there, we figured a small shelf was a minimal way of serving the same function without having a block of stuff in that vestibule. We wanted to maintain the transparency and the lightness of the vestibule space."



PROJECT CREDITS | GENERAL CONTRACTOR: L.E. MEYERS BUILDERS | STRUCTURAL CONSULTANT: STROUD, PENCE & ASSOCIATES | MECHANICAL CONSULTANT: CAPITAL ENGINEERING | PHOTOGRAPHER: JOHN M HALL PHOTOGRAPHY

Hardscapes for hard times

Lessons learned at Chelsea can grow here

BY KATE TYNDALL
CORRESPONDENT

When drought threatens and global weather chaos looms, pack a lot of hardscape into your garden and pare down the plantings.

That seemed to be the message for gardeners from London's Chelsea Flower Show this year, where the exhibits featured huge amounts of paving, stone and sculpture, with minimal planting, usually for texture.

To achieve the soft, multitextured effect that was the hallmark of so many show gardens, designers employed ornamental grasses, drought tolerant herbs and plants from a

INSIDE

How to incorporate ideas from the Chelsea Flower Show into your own garden | **PAGE 7E**

Mediterranean palette. With few exceptions, cottage gardens and lush plants lifting from a traditional British planting scheme of beds and borders in the custom of Margery Fish and Gertrude Jekyll were few and far between. (However, showgoers voted as their favorite garden the exhibit that re-created a planting scheme of eminent Edwardian designers Jekyll

SEE CHELSEA, PAGE 7E



Designer Xanthe White evokes New Zealand's black sand beaches in her glass water features for the Chelsea Flower Show in London.

home of the month

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The eastern volume has one level and contains family gathering spaces — the kitchen, family room, living and dining rooms. The western volume sits higher up into the slope and has two levels — the master suite downstairs and additional bedrooms and an office upstairs — with a carport nestled underneath. A glass vestibule links the two volumes. Concrete flooring and cypress siding from outside continue into the 6-foot-wide vestibule, letting in a sense of the outdoors. It also provides a long view down the street corridor, where you can see the horizon, Gomes says.

“That was one of the features we knew we could take advantage of,” he says.

The overall design creates an intimate connection between the home, site and landscape. It illustrates how a site’s characteristics can be successfully integrated into a home’s design. The Webb Dotti House, says the Home of the Month panel, “handles the site well and is nicely composed.”

Site issues (“problems may not be the right word,” says Gomes) that affected the design began with the sloping infill lot, which was not wide enough to accommodate the footprint of a true courtyard home. Fairly steep, it had a slope of about 16 percent.

Before construction, Gomes and Staub created several models to help identify the best placement of the house. Ultimately the house was split and nestled into the sloping land so that the homeowners could remain on the ground as they walked in and out of their home.

“We were trying to avoid having the homeowners be separated from the land,” Gomes says. “When you step out, you are on land, not on a deck looking down.”

You also can see the horizon. Says Gomes: “Cars are put in the back of the house so that the house opens out to the front of the site.”

By continuing exterior ground and wall surfaces into the interior, the architects connect the landscape and the house. Indoors and out are organized and generated from the same principles of architecture, Gomes explains. The concrete garden terrace wall, for example, is formed by a concrete wall that extends from the inside of the house.

“So, there’s a concrete element that defines the corner of the house, and it turns and is the same material that becomes a retaining wall for the terrace. The same material is forming a boundary on the inside and outside,” he says. “It is an expression of unity.”

The use of concrete, wood and metal, with glass as a secondary element, creates what the design panel characterized as “a refined elegance” that is “disciplined and very clean.” Gomes explains that the material palette has a construction logic that parallels its aesthetic qualities. The concrete, which makes up the masonry walls and smooth slabs, he says, is used where construction meets the earth. Wood frames the rest of the structure. It’s also used as a finishing material on the interior (maple floors) and the exterior (cypress siding). And where the house makes edges against the sky and landscape — roofing, copings and corners and window frames — there is metal.

“Elegant with restraint,” hails the Home of the Month panel.

But the panel was only judging the finished product, homeowner Dotti points out. The real success of the design dwells in its functionality and its collaborative process.

Says Dotti: “Cisco [Gomes] showed us that it is possible to design a modern house that is in sympathy with its surroundings, meets high standards of design, yet is at the same time affordable and a welcoming home that we can live in. His attention to detail resulted in design themes that repeat throughout the building, are in sympathy with one another, and produce a harmony and balance that is very soothing.”

The team — the homeowners, architects and contractors — were able to agree on nearly every detail of the house before construction began, a truly impressive feat.

“We had so much fun the whole time,” Webb says. “I think our design instincts were so in line with what Cisco and Dabney [designed] that there was never a problem... the process was extremely rewarding.”

Guest columnist Jessica Johnson can be reached at homeandgarden@newsobserver.com.



interior

Warm, calm hues soften the clean lines and surfaces of the living room. The ceilings of the living space are separated from the walls, creating what architects call a “reveal.” Light fixtures are located around the perimeter of the room. “The idea of the reveal was to give the living room a feeling of more volume and to also conceal the light fixtures and smoke detectors,” architect Francisco Gomes explains. “It makes for a cleaner look and washes the walls with light.” A large window lets in natural light and views of the landscape below.



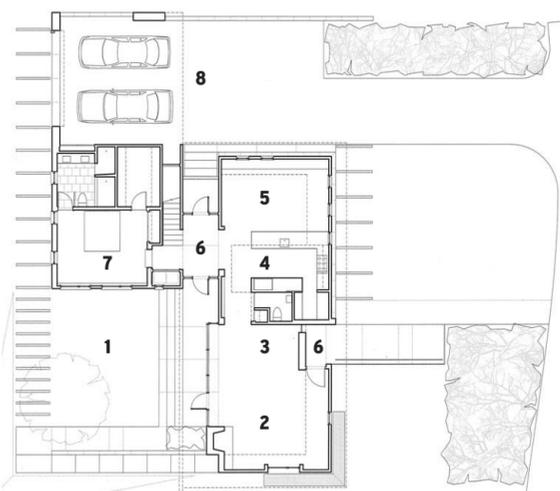
the kitchen

White cabinets and stainless steel surfaces, with halogen lighting and a glass backsplash, create a simple environment for cooking and eating. Materials used in the kitchen and vestibule represent the elements used throughout and outside the house — metal, wood, stone and glass.



the terrace

The living room, to the right in the single story block, and master bedroom, to the left in the two-story block, open out to the garden terrace, which overlooks the landscape below. The single story block contains the family gathering spaces. The two-story block houses the sleeping quarters and a carport below. The house, says architect Gomes, is “not monumental. ... Even though it’s glass and has natural materials, it blends in because of its material makeup.” Concrete, wood and metal in the form of walls, walks, siding and framing converge inside and out to create a close connection between building and landscape. “The goal was to link the two so that you are always aware of the exterior, even in the interior,” Gomes says.



THE PLAN

- 1 | Terrace
- 2 | Living room
- 3 | Dining room
- 4 | Kitchen
- 5 | Family room
- 6 | Entry
- 7 | Bedroom
- 8 | Carport

architects' aim



Gomes

Staub

As an answer to the sloping lot, the architects’ design strategy divides the house into two parts and then shifts the halves slightly apart. The ground-floor plan shows how the living spaces and master bedroom adjoin the garden terrace in the lower left. A carport at the rear of the property is located beneath the two-level block of the home. Architects Francisco Gomes and Dabney Staub wanted to create indoor and outdoor spaces with a strong connection to one another, as well as make the most of the sloping lot’s solar orientation.



the bathroom

Modern European fixtures are paired with natural stone and wood surfaces for a calm, refreshing ambience.