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# Home&Garden



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home of  
 the month

October's profile of a well-designed living space

Take a look at a photo gallery at [www.newsobserver.com](http://www.newsobserver.com), search **home&garden**.



the pavilion

Floor-to-ceiling windows bring light into Karen Griffith's rehearsal space. The 1,200-square-foot addition is designed with acoustics in mind. Throw rugs provide a dampening effect like that an audience would create. Also, acoustical drapes can be drawn around the room to 'tune' it. The nonparallel walls are modeled on those found in concert halls.

PHOTOS BY PHIL SZOSTAK

## Form and performance

An addition gives a pianist a suitable place to practice

the project

### Piano Pavilion

#### architect

Szostak Design Inc.  
 Phil Szostak 929-5422, [pszostak@szostakdesign.com](mailto:pszostak@szostakdesign.com)

#### project location

Durham

#### square footage

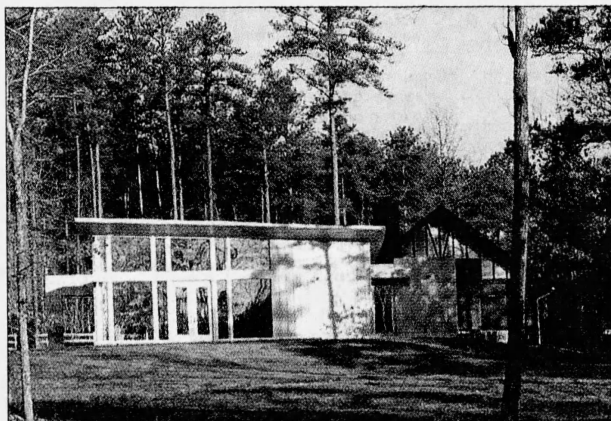
1,200

#### budget

\$125,000

#### key attributes

An intimate place for music and nature



Typical additions are usually to the side or the back, but this addition is was built on the front of the Durham house.

*Home of the Month, a collaboration with the N.C. State University College of Design, shows possibilities for constructing a living space built with homeowners' living patterns and preferences in mind. Each month we profile a different 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.*

By KENNETH LUKER  
 GUEST COLUMNIST

**a**s a gifted concert pianist, Karen Griffith has performed across the U.S. and abroad, so she knows more than the average homeowner about the characteristics of a good performance space. When Griffith needed a quiet yet inspiring space in which to practice the piano, she was not satisfied with the options available in her existing home. Not any room would do. She needed exacting acoustic quality.

Designing an acoustically perfect room for music is challenging enough, especially given the many traditions we associate with the practice and performance of music. But when the room is designed for a concert pianist accustomed to formal recital chambers and grand symphony halls, the challenge is even greater. And yet this was precisely the challenge Griffith put to Chapel Hill architect Phil Szostak.

The result of their collaboration is a simple home addition with a singular purpose inspired by the piano. At 1,200 square feet, the Piano Pavilion is a modest rehearsal and recital chamber. And although the actual size of the pavilion is small, the experience is much larger.

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# PIANO

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Traditionally, additions are placed at the rear or to the side of an existing house. Not so here, where the pavilion sits in front of the original house and forms one edge of the front lawn. To the south, the pavilion over-



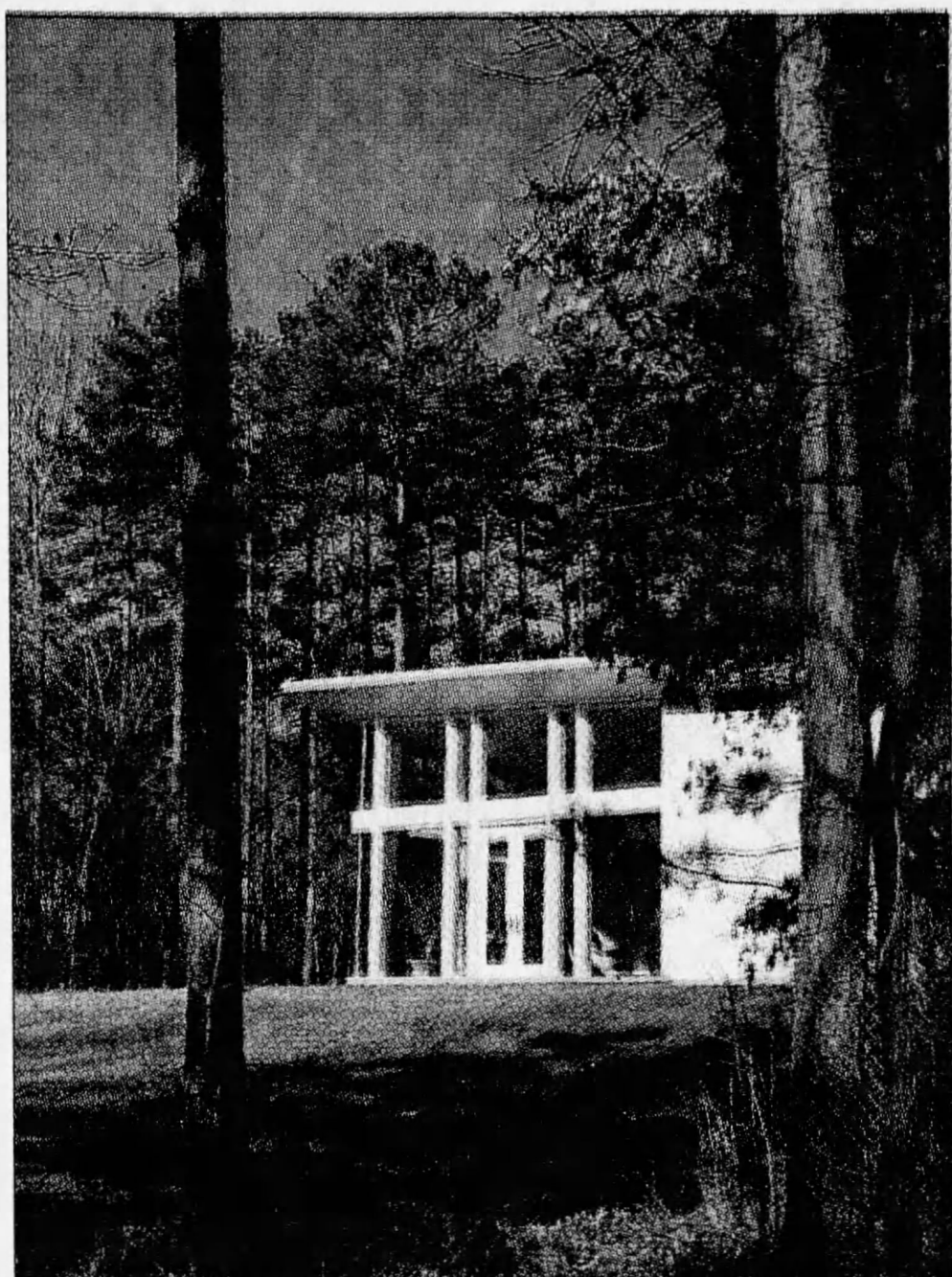
Architect  
Phil Szostak

looks a meadow. Guests approach from the north along a hand-somely trellised walkway and enter the space through a glass-enclosed foyer that connects the existing house to the addition. The small foyer in turn opens to the recital room, where guests enter near the piano as they move into the main space of the pavilion. This casual passing with the instrument underscores the intimate character of the pavilion and contrasts sharply with traditional performance halls where the piano is approached frontally and from a respectful distance.

The centerpiece of the recital room is the grand piano. Surrounding it is a simple volume of space with generous daylight that saturates the interior with warmth and rich color. From her keyboard, Griffith can look outward through a series of floor-to-ceiling windows that draw the surrounding landscape into the pavilion. The architect has cleverly used views of nature to expand the boundaries of the pavilion. In so doing, he has created for the homeowner a grand recital hall of a meadow bound by majestic trees and blue sky. "We wanted to expand the boundaries of the pavilion," Szostak said, "as if the room itself was a stage and the meadow, the concert hall."

Inside and out, the architecture is truly about the piano and its music. In describing the design, Szostak says, "Practice and recital rooms are usually contained boxes with only an inward focus. They're just about that one thing. This too is about the instrument, but it's also much more because the room looks outward too. The piano is the constant and the architecture allows the seasons to change around it." Even the form of the building comes from the piano. Resembling the open lid of a grand piano, the upward sloping main roof is the one grand gesture above a subtle building.

The clearly modern form of the pavilion is complemented by traditional construction materials and detailing. The timber trellis, vertical board and batten walls, articulated base and Ver-



The piano pavilion adds a note of elegance and appears to be a space designed for classical music.

PHOTO BY PHIL SZOSTAK

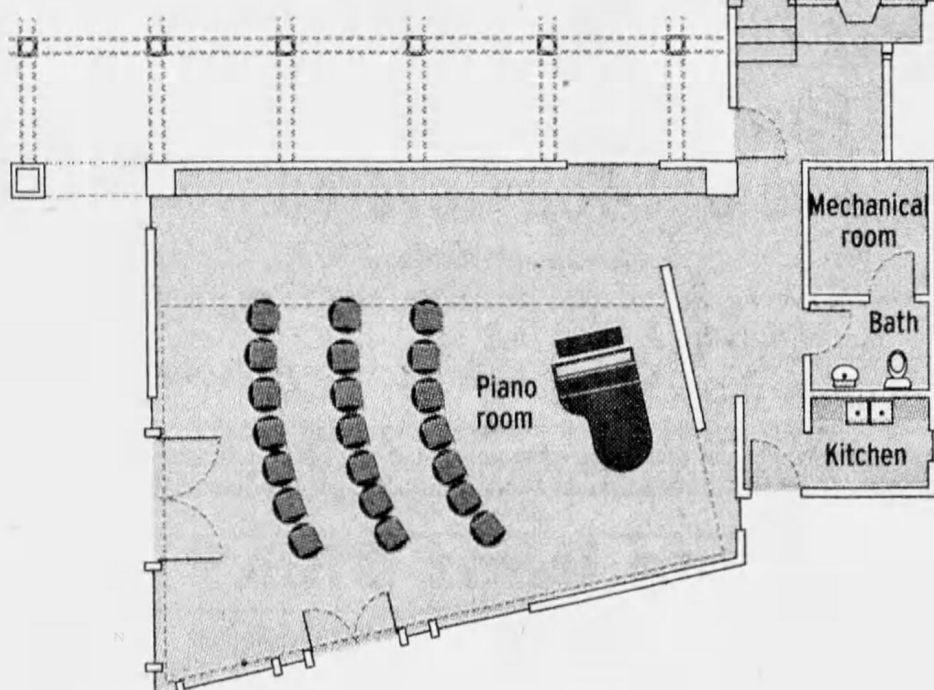
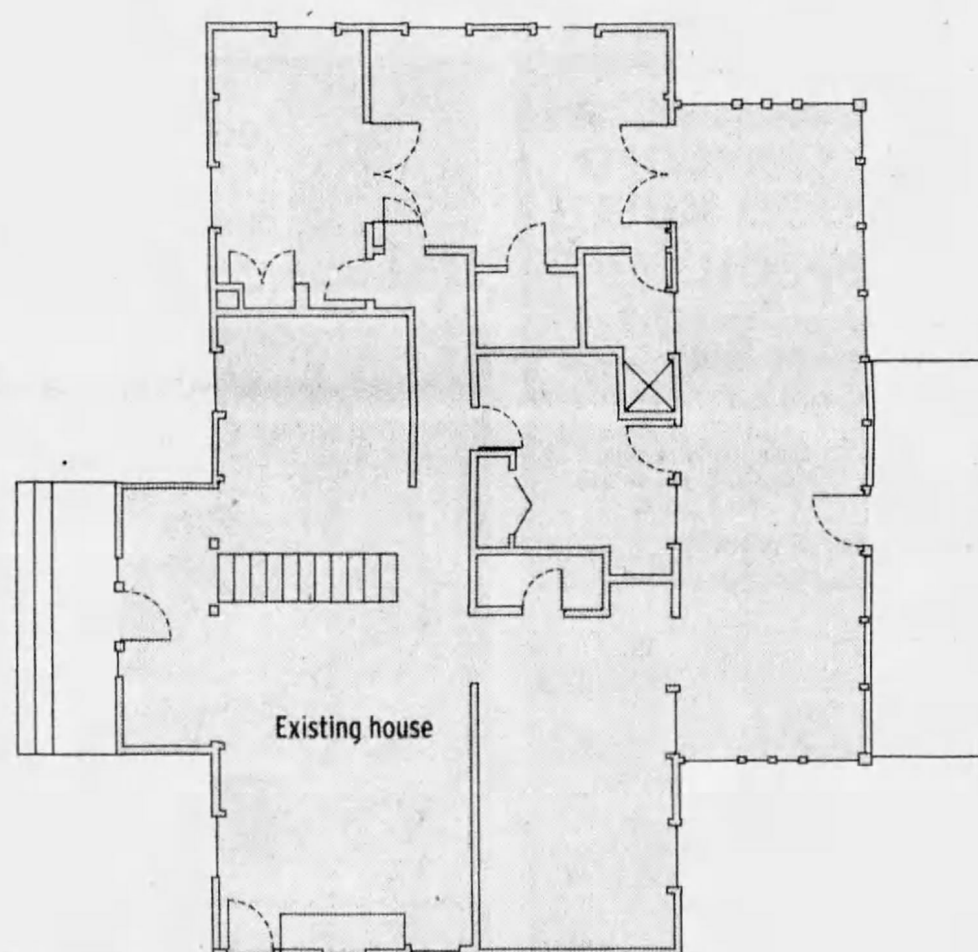
mont slate flooring ensure that this addition will age gracefully. The architecture is rendered in simple white except for the dark, moss green stone floor.

Acoustical considerations are also paramount in the design. Several simple, low-tech accommodations were made to ensure acoustic quality. Foremost, the geometry of the plan provides nonparallel walls that limit sympathetic resonance. Also, because practice sessions are louder than a room full of people, large throw rugs are used to simulate the dampening effect of several audience members. The room can also be "tuned" by use of an acoustical drape that can

be pulled around the room. This same drape, in conjunction with a thin, white curtain helps to control the bright southern sun.

The Piano Pavilion is an elegant addition to a simple house. Its design captures the subtleties one might expect of a small, intimate building for classical music. Overall, the building sits well in its environment and is rendered with appropriate scale and material. It is a modest addition with a big space for music.

*Kenneth Luker is design principal with The Freelon Group: Architects. He is a frequent studio juror at the NCSU School of Design.*



## the plan

The piano room is 1,200 square feet, providing enough space for a small audience.