

# Civic Character

BUILT ON A HIGHLY VISIBLE ATLANTA SITE, THIS HOME TAKES DESIGN CUES FROM STATELY PUBLIC ARCHITECTURE.

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**URBAN CROSSROADS** The wrap-around balcony, *left*, captures a view of a church at a busy intersection. **RELAXED ENTRY** Classic tongue-and-groove paneling gives the entry, *below*, the illusion of age. **ARRIVAL UPSTAIRS** Plaster walls in the stairwell continue upstairs, *opposite*, giving the large living room the strength associated with old homes.

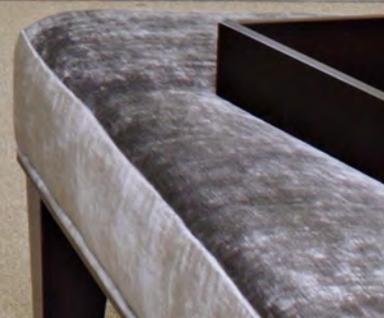


## A prominent site

Don Donnelly and Pam Sessions' home is poised between two worlds: the charm of Atlanta's historical Buckhead district and the modernity of the city's high-rise office buildings. Sitting at the confluence of several busy streets—with headlights illuminating the lot—the small, sloped property demanded a special kind of house. The couple worked with residential designer Lew Oliver to design an adaptation of a brick Roman Revival that passersby commonly mistake for a civic monument. "Because of the public nature of the site, I wanted to do an iconic building so the home is more of a civic expression than a residential expression," Oliver says. "It's a very nice focal point for the boulevard. It has almost a larger-than-life prominence just by the nature of the site."

## CLASSIC DESIGN

The X motif designer Lew Oliver used for windows and stair and balcony railings is rooted in ancient Roman temples. "This is a simplified version, even minimalist," he says. "It's in harmony with the classical style of the home—more fitting than a straight window grid. It's a pattern people are used to seeing on civic buildings."



**UPLIFTING IDEA** Strategically placed sconces accentuate the crown molding and tall ceiling in the living/dining area. Ceiling lights were kept to a minimum to open sight lines throughout the house.





## LESSONS IN CIVIC STYLE

Architectural designer Lew Oliver shares four strategies for giving a home civic character.

### Grand scale

“The main room is really in the style of an old ballroom. The sum of any three rooms is always greater than what could be achieved by separate rooms. It forms a much bigger impression for the same amount of space.”

### Plaster walls

“It’s such a classic finish. It really references the solidity of older buildings.”

### Tall windows

“They’re very uniform and act in concert to make the room feel like a whole instead of one of the windows being larger or arched to become a focal point. From the outside, it looks like a colonnade, with flat pilasters, that happened to be glazed with windows.”

### Elaborate millwork

“Moldings are devices to achieve effects. They’re used for drama and scale. Here, the crown molding adds prominence. It also forms a horizontal line that makes the room seem more human.”



## Clear space definition

To deal with the complexities of the site, Oliver designed an “upside-down house,” with public areas on the top level to take advantage of the views. “Even though it’s one large room, it serves multiple functions and each area has its own sense of place,” Pam says. “It was important that it be as comfortable for a large party or intimate dinner as it is for the most casual times with just our family.” A 14-foot-high cove ceiling and tall windows define the living/dining area. A fireplace that anchors the living area establishes a spot for conversation; it also divides the lofty space from a more intimate study/TV room. At the opposite end, the space makes a slight L to the kitchen, where the ceiling height drops to about 10 feet. “There’s a nice balance, with the kitchen appearing slightly tucked away,” Pam says.

**CONVERSATION AREA** Camargue stone details the fireplace that anchors the living area, *above*. **DINING LIGHT** With no chandelier above the table, the dining area, *right*, has unobstructed views. Recessed ceiling lights supplement the sunshine.



# Living Large in Less Space

At about 3,000 square feet (not including the first level), this home isn't large, yet it is full of function. Architectural designer Lew Oliver borrowed elements from ancient Italian architecture to conceive what he calls "a futuristic version of an Etruscan temple." The long, narrow home mimics the temple form and accommodates a room arrangement that creates the illusion of more space.

■ **Expansive balcony** Wrapping three sides of the house, the iron-clad balcony extends the living space to the outdoors.

■ **Open living area** The large room gives guests lots of space to mingle; the kitchen is semiprivate.

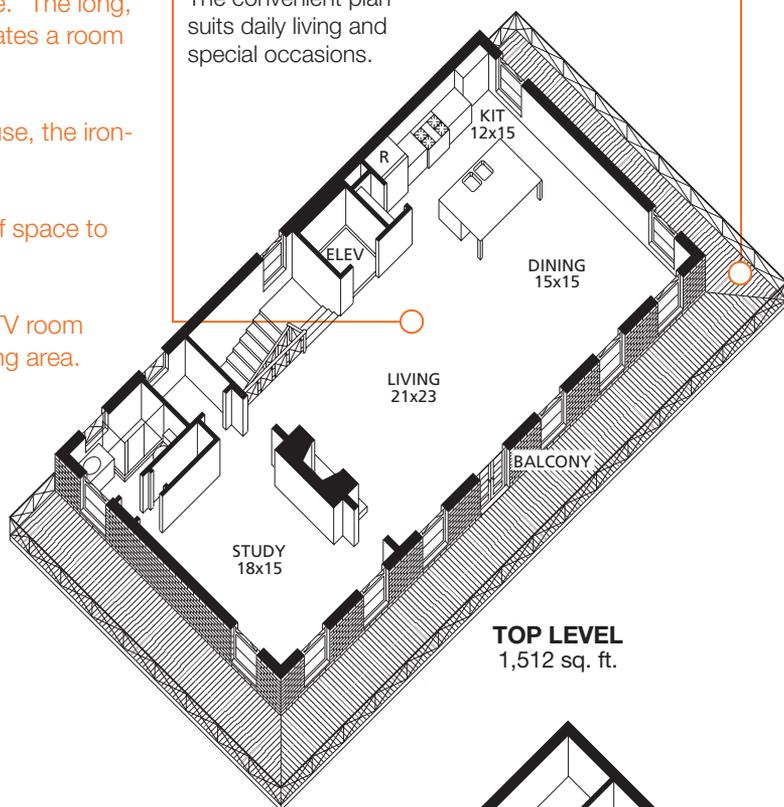
■ **Quiet study** Tucked behind the fireplace, the study/TV room offers a reprieve from social activities in the primary living area.

## Oversize balcony

Entertaining is easy given the generous, easily accessed outdoor spaces.

## Lofty living

The convenient plan suits daily living and special occasions.

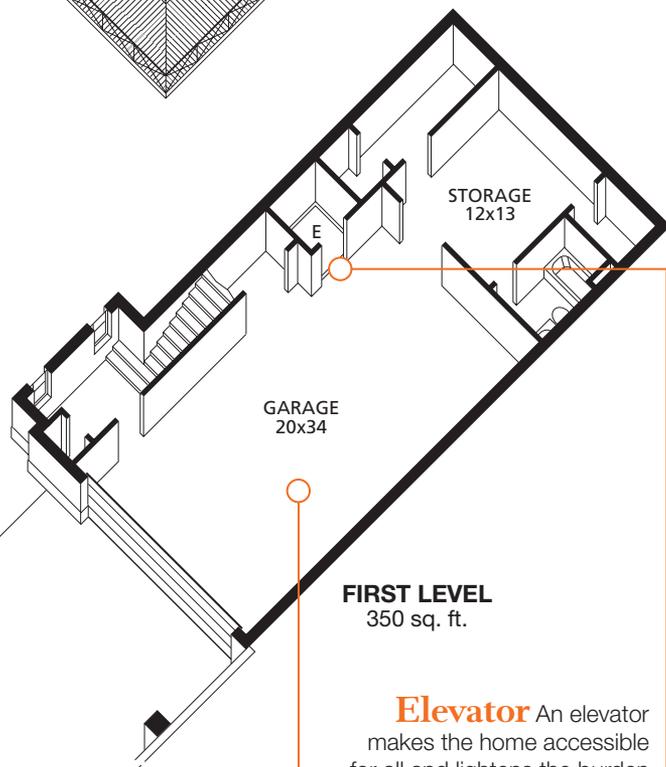


■ **Dual vanity** Two freestanding vanities have the function of a double vanity without the mass.

■ **Open stair** A railing, rather than a wall, prevents a claustrophobic feeling in the small entry.



■ **Cozy entry** The narrow entry draws the eye to the stairs—and the public rooms at the top.



■ **Elevator** An elevator makes the home accessible for all and lightens the burden of carrying groceries upstairs.

■ **Underground parking** A tuck-under garage maximizes the property's limited space.



## Entertaining with ease

Because Pam and Don frequently entertain, they needed a highly functional kitchen. "I didn't want to hide the fact it was a kitchen, but I also wanted it to feel appropriate in its placement as part of the living and dining areas," Pam says. "It was important to give special attention to the design and finishes." The oversized island and its honed marble top sets the stage. "It makes an elegant transition to the dining room," Pam says. The deep counter is a handy buffet and buffers guests from the nitty-gritty of cooking and catering. Housing the sink, dishwasher, and microwave, the island also establishes a convenient work zone, with the range



directly across from the sink. Painted cabinets with frosted-glass upper doors get their gray hue from the veining in the marble that covers the range wall—a departure from the room’s plaster walls. “It feels as if you’re in an old Italian house that has been renovated,” says interior designer Janie Hirsch, who worked on the home’s decor.

**EFFICIENT LAYOUT** The kitchen, *above*, features a compact triangular work zone. The refrigerator, concealed by panels, is to the left of the dual-fuel range. **MATERIAL MIX** Stainless steel is a modern contrast to classic marble and plaster walls, *opposite*.



**LESSONS LEARNED** Pam Sessions shares her insights as a builder (she and Don co-own Hedgewood Properties) and how she approached her Buckhead home.

**Q** You seem to like homes that are on the small side. That’s kind of unusual for a builder, isn’t it?

**A** I like to call this right-sizing. I’d much rather spend time in a room I truly love and use than to move within a home from place to place if those places don’t delight me.

**Q** So, quality over quantity?

**A** Quality over quantity is something people in all stages of their lives are thinking about—not just empty-nesters. With the savings from building a smaller home, you can afford quality features. We invested in marble, wood-paneled walls, and plaster walls. We repeated many of the materials. Consistency of materials creates the illusion of a larger space.

**Q** You took a challenging site and made it work. Do people just need to step out of the box a bit?

**A** Absolutely. A design needs to meet your lifestyle rather than forcing it to accommodate conventional wisdom. I’ve found that customers for today’s new homes—myself included—respond more favorably to something that liberates them to go beyond their last environment.



## Quality versus quantity

Compared to the voluminous multitasking common rooms on the top level, the ground-level spaces are introverted. With bedrooms located here, Oliver compartmentalized the layout, making rooms more intimate. (A masonry wall lining the property adds fortresslike strength, thwarting the glare of headlights from passing traffic.) The master suite exemplifies Pam's overall approach to scaling back on size but not on luxurious appointments. Walls are covered with 1x8 tongue-and-groove planking instead of drywall; the planking runs throughout the level for a space-expanding effect. "When people see it, they're so delighted with the texture and look that they forget the rooms aren't large," Oliver says. "It turns a small space into an asset. It's a very durable material that will take on a patina. When that happens, it will give the home a sense of history."

The master bath—also not grand in size—pampers the owners with a freestanding tub, marble flooring, and white

tilled walls. "We wanted to give it a modern edge—a crisp, clean feel," Hirsch says. Two freestanding vanities placed side by side offer grooming stations for Pam and Don. "It provides an element of surprise over the expected double vanity," Pam says. She may just as well be talking about the home as a whole. After all, what many motorists take to be an old no-frills civic structure is actually a pampering oasis for Pam and her family. "From inside, it looks and feels like a five-star hotel," she says.

Residential designer **Lew Oliver** Interior designer **Janie Hirsch**  
Builder **Pam Sessions**

### RESOURCES ON PAGE 120

**EXPANDING BEDROOM** French doors in the master bedroom, *above*, open to a courtyard. "It's like another room rather than just a yard," Pam Sessions says. **DELUXE BATH** White ceramic subway tile forms a bright backdrop in the master bath, *opposite*.



## Modern Faucets

This bath's faucet is by Kohler (the Purist widespread lavatory faucet K-14406-3, \$386 and up, 800/456-4537, [www.kohler.com](http://www.kohler.com)). Here are some of our editors' favorite modern finds.



### Minimalist waterfall

The 12-inch Axor Starck X mixer, \$978. Hansgrohe, 800/334-0455, [www.hansgrohe-usa.com](http://www.hansgrohe-usa.com)



**Small and simple** The Soul Single-Lever Lav faucet, \$522-\$614. Villeroy & Boch, 800/774-1181, [www.villeroy-boch.com](http://www.villeroy-boch.com)



**Bold silhouette** The Tara.Logic single-lever faucet by Sieger Design, \$912-\$1,136. Dornbracht, 800/774-1181, [www.dornbracht.com](http://www.dornbracht.com)