



Making a Better Ranch



When they first saw the house, the Brights thought it was the ugliest place on Lookout Mountain. A two-story ranch built in the 1960s, it was clad in white vinyl and brick. But when George walked out to the edge of the bluff and took in the view, he changed his mind. They bought the house immediately.

Over the next few years, they concentrated on renovating the interior, but they weren't sure what to do about the exterior. They knew that they wanted the house to appear less dated; they wanted to reconcile its hard look with the natural mountain setting, improving the relationship of the house to the site in a way that allowed them more opportunities to enjoy this beautiful little piece of northern Georgia.

One of the first decisions was to use local building materials; they really help to tie house and site together. When a house shares materials with its surrounding environment, it becomes more connected to that place, blurring the boundary between building and landscape. The house and site gain a unique sense of identity that can only improve the owners' emotional ties to the property. Also, local materials are often

An exterior remodel and some thoughtful landscaping give a '60s dinosaur new life

BY TINA GOVAN



Blending the house back into the landscape. Unlike the stark contrast between the site and the original vinyl-sided house (photo above), the ranch (facing page) was remodeled with materials that gave the structure a more natural feel. Pergolas (photo left) also were used to blur the distinction between the landscape and the house. Photos taken at A and B on floor plan.



A better place to enjoy the backyard. Although lush, the unbroken lawn didn't offer a dedicated place for gatherings. (Photos above and inset taken at C on floor plan.) Built out from the new screened porch, a broad arbor extends the sense of enclosure onto the flagstone patio, where the view can be enjoyed in comfort. Photo right taken at D on floor plan.



cheaper and more sustainable. Transportation costs are less, which in turn cuts overall costs. Because materials are close by, energy is saved in their transfer over shorter distances, and they are replaced more easily when needed.

A change of clothes makes all the difference

As I mentioned, the Brights' house sits atop Lookout Mountain, a high plateau that's carpeted in hardwood trees growing up through sandstone outcroppings. As it was built, the house looked very much out of place. The Brights and I took several steps to make it fit better.

First, the brick veneer was torn off the house to make room for more stone that continues up to form a base for the house. In places, the stone rises up as walls, columns, and a chimney, making the house seem as if it grew out of the ground around it. At the walls, we replaced the stark white vinyl siding with more natural-looking cedar shakes, helping to blend the house into the surrounding woods. We replaced all the brick paving with local flagstone, a move that more strongly integrates the outdoor spaces with the surrounding rock ledges of the bluff.

Building transitional spaces, or "thickening the edge"

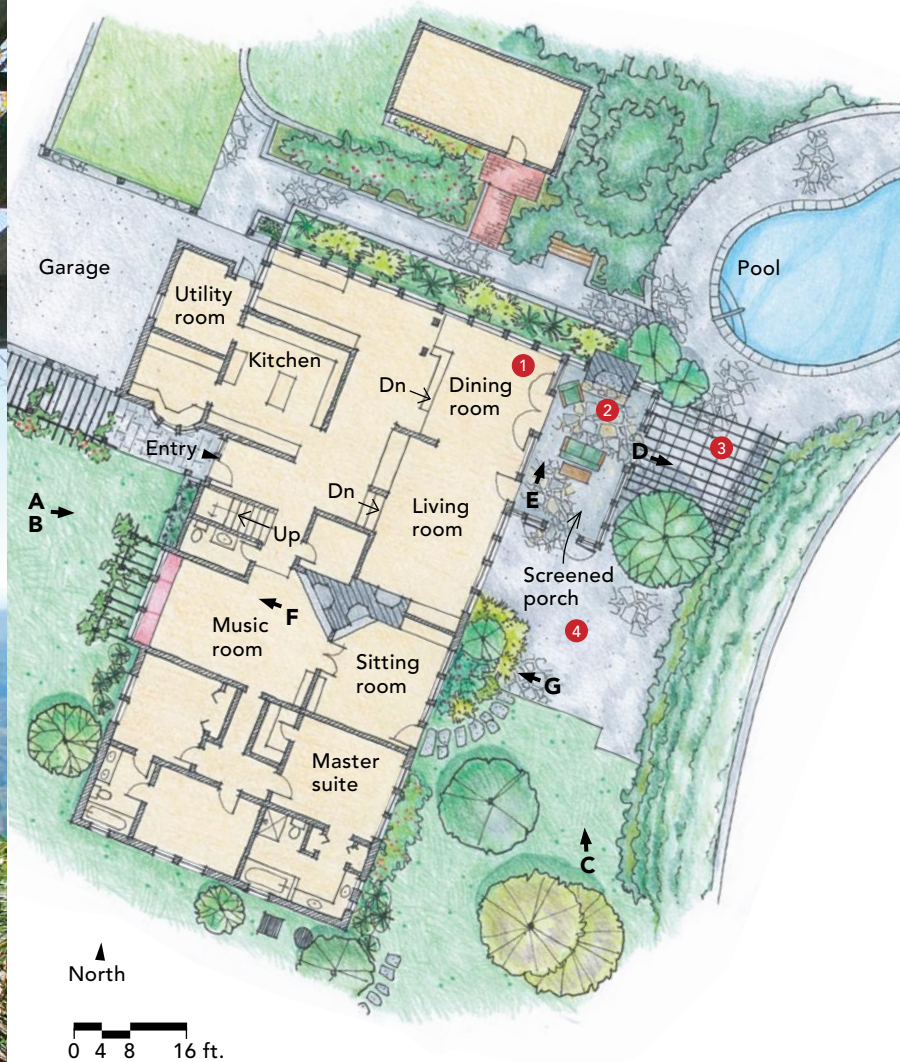
To integrate a home better with its site, you must pay close attention to where the two meet. Rather than separating a home's interior from the outside with a simple stud wall, you can create a zone of transitional spaces that gradually take





REDEFINED SPACES BECOME MORE INVITING

The major renovations transformed the site's undifferentiated lawn into well-defined spaces that help to tie the house visually to the site. These spaces also create distinct gathering areas—the outdoor equivalent of the living and dining rooms—where the homeowners can take full advantage of the site's benefits.



Photos taken at lettered positions.

- 1 New double doors in the dining room replace a single door and create a strong sightline out through the trellis.
- 2 The screened porch replaces a concrete pad of similar size. Its flagstone floor continues onto the patio and around the pool.
- 3 A trellis extends the sense of enclosure from the screened porch and frames the view from the dining room.
- 4 The existing concrete sidewalk was torn up and replaced with an outdoor terrace.



The best of both worlds. Replacing a concrete patio at the back of the house, the screened porch and fireplace create a transition between the dining room and the new patio area. Skylights keep the space bright and inviting. Photo taken at E on floor plan.

you from inside to out. In the same way that materials can blur the distinction between house and landscape, this broader interface presents and mixes the best qualities of both.

For example, on the bluff side of the house, we introduced a series of transitional spaces to soften the change from living and dining rooms to the backyard. Before, the choice was limited: in or out. Now the spaces gradually become less enclosed as you move from the dining room to the skylit screened porch, then to the trellised terrace, and finally out to the open patio and its expansive view. The screened porch has become a kind of second living room, a place where the family gathers to watch an approaching storm roll in over the mountains or to sit around a roaring fire on a chilly night and play guitars. They now have more choices: They don't have to be totally inside or outside; they can be in between.

We also extended the house out to the landscape at the entry, where a far-reaching pergola draws visitors to the front door. What used to be a dark vinyl-covered



A tiny addition with lots of punch. A big, comfortable window seat in the music room not only served to extend the room's reach out to the front lawn but also helped to reduce the horizontal line of the ranch's front elevation. Photo taken at F on floor plan.



ADDING EXTRA WEATHERPROOFING AND TEXTURE

Charged with filling out the details in the overall renovation, Henley Brothers Construction of Chattanooga, Tenn., first peeled away the house's brick veneer and vinyl siding down to the plywood sheathing. Next, they installed new builder's felt; Clay Henley prefers it to modern housewraps and thinks it's sturdier and easier to work with. A double layer of cedar sidewall shingles was installed at a 6-in. exposure. Each double course was backed by a 12-in.-wide strip of 15-lb. builder's felt that serves as a backup in case shingles split or crack. Photos taken at G on floor plan.

canopy is now a vine-covered structure animated by sunlight, casting dappled shadows on the adjacent stone wall.

In yet another instance, we chose to thicken the edge in a way that would help to erase a signature feature of 1960s ranch houses: the strong, horizontal cantilever line at the second floor. A large window seat projecting at ground level pushes the exterior wall out flush with the wall above, so the cantilever disappears.

By adding the window seat, we also were able to make a stronger connection from the house to the front yard. With most of the interior views oriented toward the back, there had been few places from which you could appreciate the front. Now there's a sun-filled niche that provides a place to sit and feels as if it's half in the garden and half in the house.

Making the outdoors more inviting

Just as indoor rooms need to be enclosed, outdoor spaces need to be defined to encourage indoor/outdoor living. Despite the incredible view and setting, the original ranch

house lacked any well-defined outdoor spaces. The existing outdoor space was basically lawn with a sidewalk. We divided the site into room-size areas and defined them to various degrees with paving, low walls, hedges, trees, gardens, roofs, and trellises, creating a range of comfortable spaces that invite you to sit and enjoy the view.

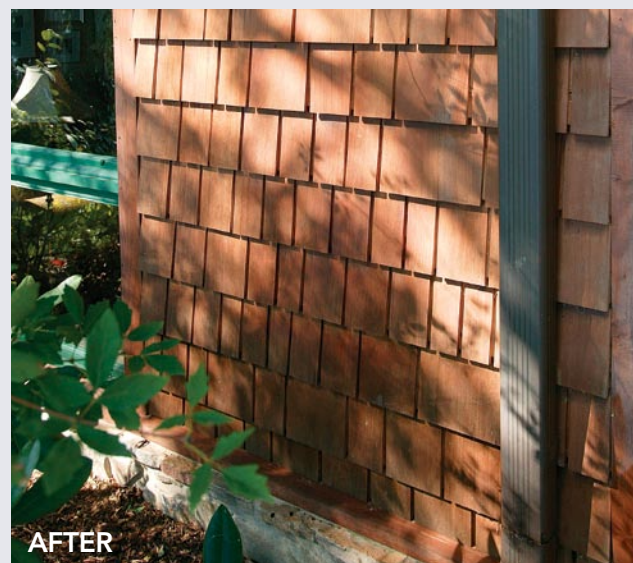
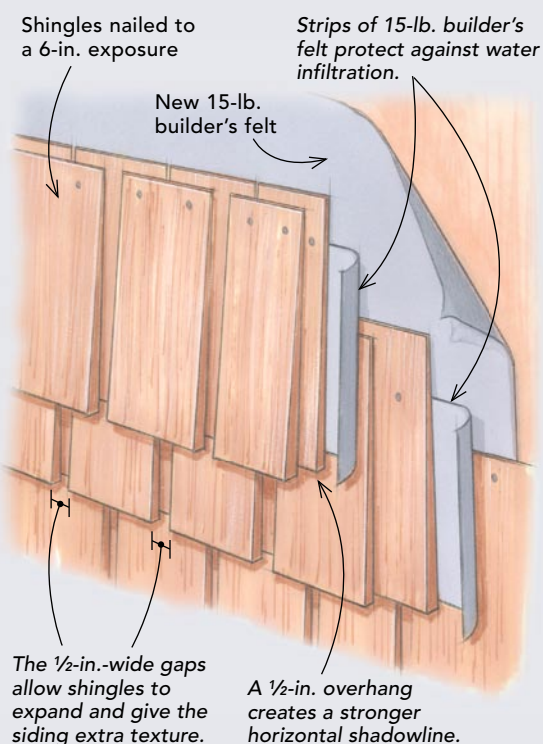
We opened the dining room with tall double doors that open onto the new screened porch, which in turn opens onto the terrace through another set of double doors. These openings are aligned to lead your gaze directly out to the bluff, where stone columns frame the distant view.

The living room, which previously was trapped inside, now has easy access to the bluff with the addition of an exterior glass door. Because of these new connections, living and dining spill outside. This increases the usable square footage of the house, makes the house feel bigger, and allows for flexibility so that the interior living space can expand and contract with the seasons. □

Tina Govan has an architectural practice that's based in Raleigh, N.C.
Photos by Charles Bickford, except where noted.



BEFORE



AFTER