

A Duplex Grows in

BY JILL AND JOHN BOURATOGLU



As a pair of young architects with two small children living in Brooklyn, N.Y., one of the most expensive real-estate markets in the country, we found ourselves in a housing dilemma: We couldn't afford \$1.5 million for a brownstone, nor could we squeeze much more time out of the two-bedroom apartment we'd occupied since before the kids were born. Our solution was to look for a vacant lot somewhere in the city and to build our own house.

After squeezing two more years out of our small apartment, we found a long, skinny, irregularly shaped lot. The 25-ft. by 116-ft. lot was located on the edge of a brownstone neighborhood, adjacent to some commercial buildings that quickly were being converted to residential use. The neighborhood was about to blossom.

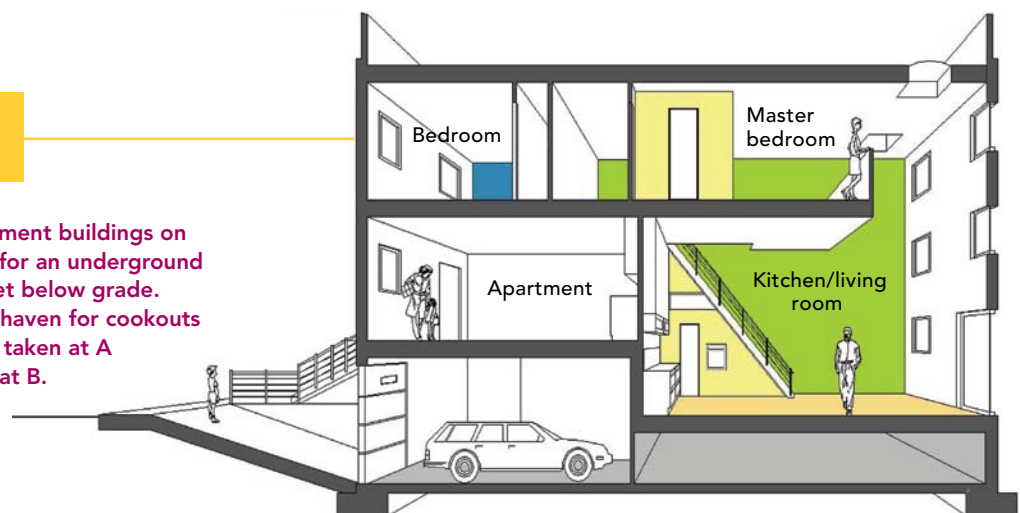
Duplex cuts the mortgage in half

With a tight lot, a tighter time line, and a tightening budget, we did as much ourselves as possible. Although we had designed lots of houses, we had never built one before. We researched and bought online many of the components and materials for our house (sidebar p. 79). Besides the masonry, electrical, and plumbing subcontractors, the UPS and Federal Express drivers were key members of our building team.

Installing the drywall, laying the tile, and painting the walls ourselves saved money in the short term. But it was our decision to design

CUTE LITTLE BUILDING WITH TWO HUGE ASSETS

Tucked between two "grown-up" apartment buildings on a skinny city lot, this house finds space for an underground garage by setting it back from the street below grade. Out back is a comfortable yard that's a haven for cookouts and playing with the kids. Photo above taken at A on floor plan; photo facing page taken at B.



Brooklyn

Juggling setbacks and ceiling heights gains a garage, and an apartment to help with the mortgage



Coloring these large walls channels attention to the view of the backyard.

Color makes big walls cozier. With color on both sides, the white wall draws the eye toward the backyard view. Photo right taken at C on floor plan. Rather than unifying windows, doors, walls, and floors with baseboard and casing, the authors chose to isolate them with metal drywall reveals (photo below). Square cutouts in the half-wall, which echo window placement, are for inevitable bulb changes in the hanging lamps. Bottom photo taken at D on floor plan.



the house as a duplex that has helped with the mortgage. Plus, the rental apartment will continue to be a source of income after the mortgage is paid off.

Off-street parking in the city is worth its space in gold

Another major consideration in our design was parking. Many New Yorkers don't own cars because there is nowhere to park them affordably; those who do routinely pay \$3,000 a year for off-street parking. By squeezing a garage into the plan, we were able to avoid a parking bill and raise the value of our house significantly.

To find space for a garage, we designed the house backward. Rather than starting with a floor plan and then working into a section drawing, we began with a cross section showing how far back from the street we could locate a garage below grade and still have a driveway



THE HOUSE ENVELOPS AN APARTMENT

Tucked above the garage and below the kids' bedrooms, a one-bedroom apartment occupies the front third of the house. Behind it, the open plan of the main-floor living area is defined by ceiling heights. This openness continues upstairs to the master bedroom/office, which is open to below over a half-wall.

SPECS

Bedrooms: 3 (house)
+ 1 (apartment)

Bathrooms: 2½ (house)
+ 1 (apartment)

Size: 1950 sq. ft. (house)
+ 500 sq. ft. (apartment)
+ 400 sq. ft. (garage)

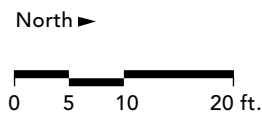
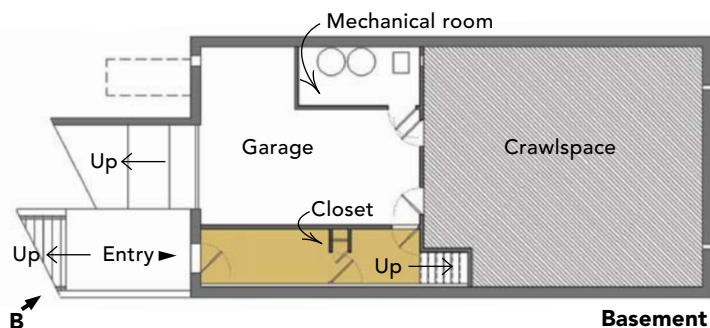
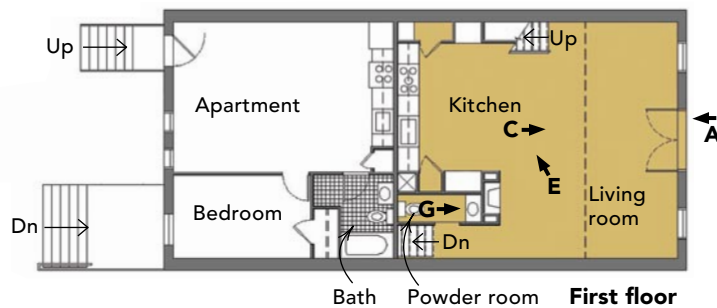
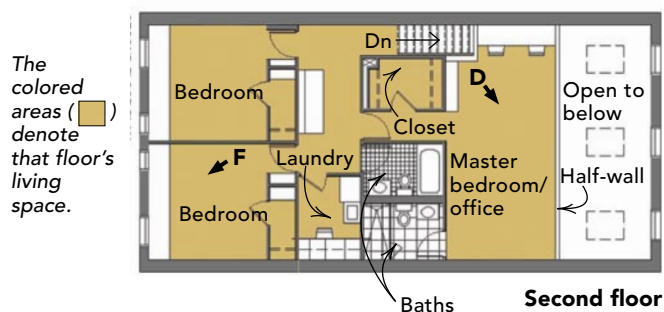
Cost: \$135 per sq. ft.

Completed: 2005

Location: Brooklyn, N.Y.

Architect: Bouratoglou
Architect, PC

Builder: John
Bouratoglou and I.E.B.
General Contracting
Corp.



Photos taken at lettered positions.

that wasn't too steep (drawing p. 74). Unfortunately, every inch that we set the house back ate up an inch of our backyard, which is another precious commodity in the city. Setting the house back from the street, however, ultimately benefited both our neighbors and us: It kept our house from being monstrously tall; it allowed more natural light into the neighboring co-op apartment building; and it reduced the sightlines from our living room into our other neighbor's rear carriage house.

By keeping the ceiling height in the garage to a minimum (8 ft.) and setting the apartment on top, we derived the ceiling height in the living room. Our front entrance is at the same level as the garage and leads into a mudroom, up a few stairs, and into a large, open, double-height living/dining/kitchen area (floor plans right). The master bedroom/office overlooks this main room, and three skylights aligned

Simple strategy for a streamlined look. Recessing the appliances into the wall emphasizes their steel facades and hides their bulk. Cream-colored walls soften the black, white, and gray palette typical of modern design. Photo taken at E on floor plan.



over three bays of windows bring in natural light and establish a connection to the backyard from both floors.

Modern materials, classical proportions

John grew up in Athens, Greece, and has been influenced greatly by classical architecture. Although not directly apparent in our home, the exterior proportions are derived from the classical model of the Parthenon. The front and rear facades are divided into three sections using the base, shaft, and capital proportions found in classical orders. We emphasized the proportions by framing them with minimalist materials, the same way the Parthenon's shapes are punctuated with white marble. Instead of white marble, though, we chose fiber-cement board in keeping with our "modern classical" scheme—and our limited budget.

Outside, the windows and their cement-board surrounds are recessed into the brick facade, creating shadows that reinforce the simple shapes. The interior approach is the same. Rather than using

baseboard and casing to unify floors, walls, windows, and doors, we used reveals and aluminum J-channel to separate them. In the kitchen, appliances are recessed into the walls to highlight their facades while minimizing their visual weight.

Because the walls are 50 ft. long and 25 ft. tall, the modern architectural palette of black, white, and gray just wouldn't work on them. Coloring these large walls enlivens them and also frames a view of the backyard. Our color choices are typical of what you see when taking in this view: blue and green. The white is the whitest white we could find.

Although this house seems to be a jumble of architectural thoughts spanning from ancient to modern times, for us it's really a culmination. Our goal was to achieve (we hope) the classical adage "The whole is greater than the sum of its parts." □

Jill and John Bouratoglou teach and practice architecture in Brooklyn, N.Y. Photos by Randy O'Rourke.

THE HOUSE THAT FEDEX BUILT

By Jill Bouratoglou

After teaching classes at New York City College of Technology, updating and revising the drawings for the house, making site visits, and being a mom, I found myself with 10 hours left in the day for material selections and purchases: from 8 p.m. to 6 a.m. Because local distributors weren't open during those hours, I turned to online retailers, where I purchased everything from the flooring to the fans. I found great prices, tracked the shipping online, and had everything delivered directly to the job site without ever leaving home.



While all of the Web sites listed below were useful, the Hakatai tile site (www.hakatai.com) was a pleasant surprise. It allowed me to design a custom blend of mosaic tiles for the first-floor powder room. I could choose the percentage of each color and see a diagram of the design online within seconds. I kept changing the percentages until I was happy with the mix (or until I could no



Coolest online finds. On www.hakatai.com, you can blend glass tiles in customized mosaics, murals, borders, and tile rugs. Playful and useful, the ceiling fans in the kids' bedrooms also were found online. Besides fans, Farrey's sells lighting, hardware, and kitchen and bath products. Photo left taken at F on floor plan; photo above taken at G.

longer tell the difference). When three cases of tiles arrived a few weeks later, I was impressed with the final result of my own custom blend. Besides mosaics, the Hakatai site offers the capability to custom-design murals, borders, and tile rugs.

ONLINE SOURCES

Carpeting
www.interfaceflor.com

Cement board
www.cbf11.com

Central vacuum
www.centralvacuumstores.com

Fans
www.farreys.com

Fireplace
www.stovesdirect.com

Front doors
www.upstatedoor.com

House numbers
www.customhousenumbers.com

Glass shower door
www.abcshowerdoor.com

Kitchen and bathroom faucets
www.irawoodinc.com

Kitchen cabinets
www.newformkitchens.com

Laundry/children's cabinets
www.ikea.com

Mailbox
www.chiasso.com

Window and door reveals
www.gordongrid.com

Windows
www.marvin.com

Wood flooring
www.lumberliquidators.com