

A Tiny Addition for a



Dining, living, office, laundry, bathing, sleeping, and storage space built in just 650 sq. ft.

BY TINA GOVAN

My husband and I moved into our 1923 bungalow in downtown Raleigh, N.C., as a young couple. Ten years, two children, and one dog later, the house had become cramped. Having lived in Japan, we were accustomed to tight quarters, but the constraints of 1000 sq. ft. had become too great, especially with the added demands of my home office. We chose to add on to our home instead of moving and had a lot of needs to accommodate, but not a lot of space to do it.

For two years, I worked as an architect in Japan and admired how the Japanese were able to introduce a sense of expansiveness within the smallest of structures. It was through my observations there that I developed many of my own design ideas. With a strong reliance on those strategies, I approached

the challenge of designing our tiny addition.

Soft spatial boundaries allow multiuse spaces

Using changes in ceiling height, floor level, or materials; using partial or sliding walls rather than solid, full-height ones; using pocket doors rather than swinging doors; and carving niches within larger spaces are all strategies I used for distinguishing spaces in a softer way.

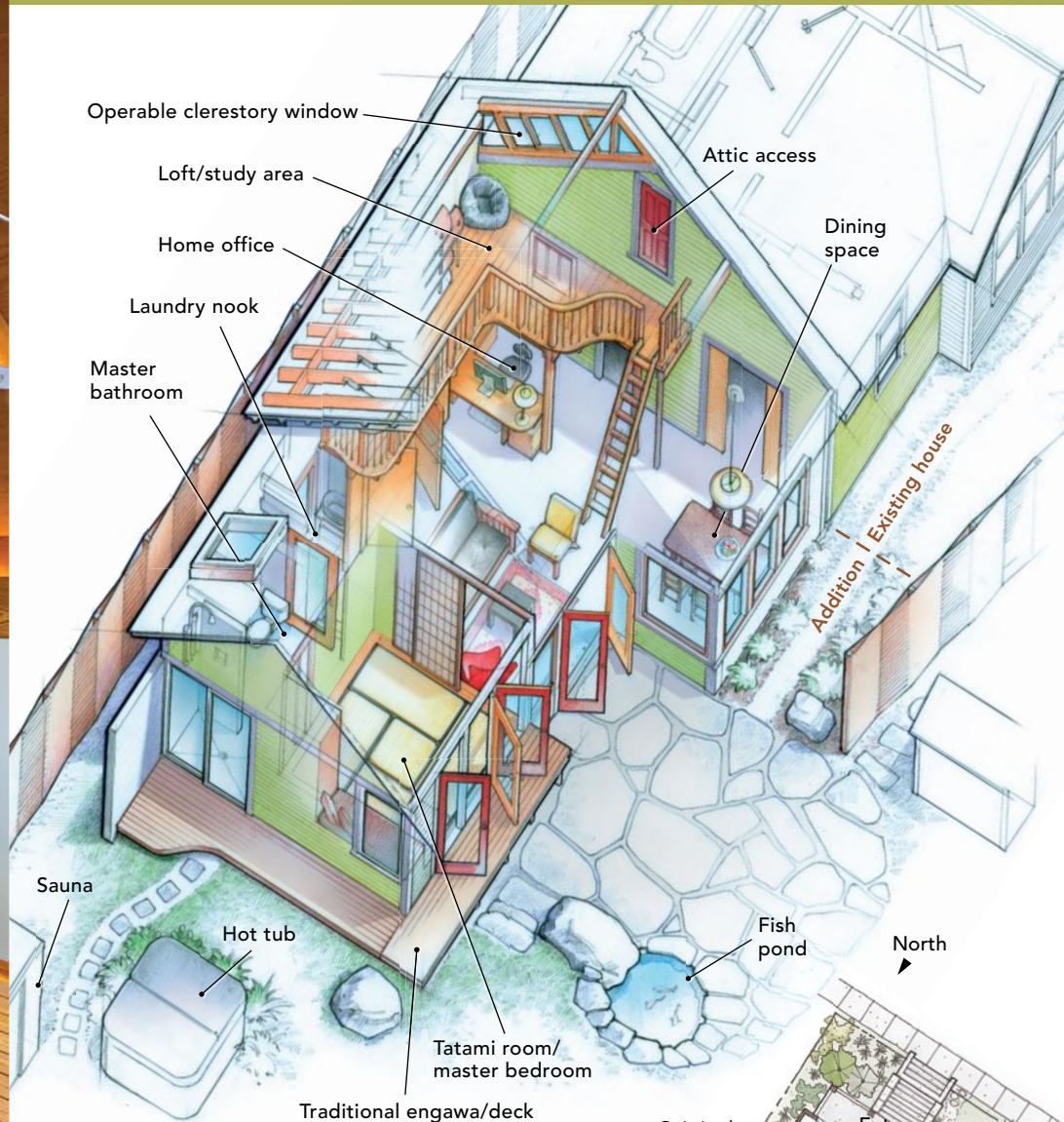
The main common room, or plaza, of the addition needed to serve a wide range of functions. To keep the area open and to avoid separate rooms for each use, I created small but distinctive spaces along the edges of a high central living area.

One corner of the addition provides a dining space surrounded by a bank of windows, while the other accommodates my home



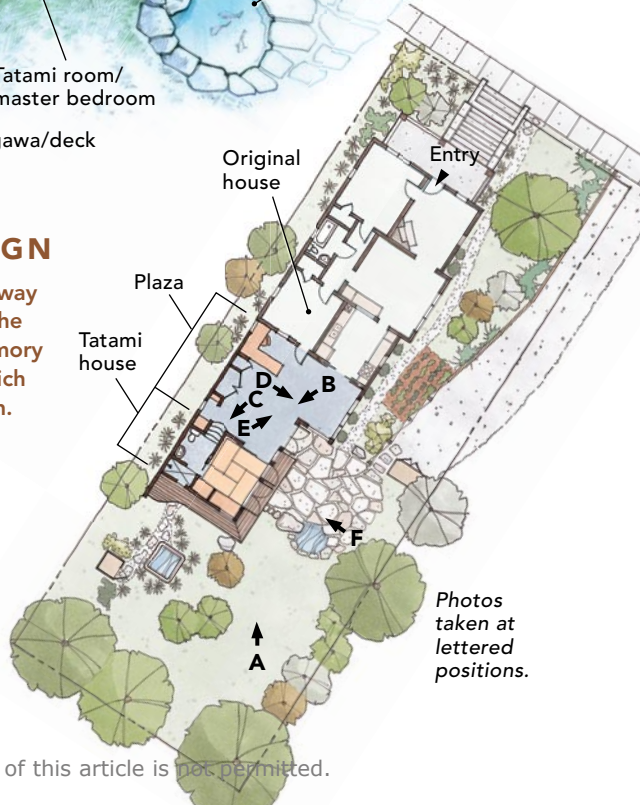
Free-flowing and functional. The addition is not defined by rooms and walls, but by open spaces that serve a variety of tasks. Southern yellow pine adds rich trim details throughout, while a roof comprised of rigid-foam insulation, A/C plywood, and cable collar ties helps to keep the bones of the structure in focus. Photo top left taken at A on floor plan; photo above taken at B.

Growing Family



JAPANESE CONCEPTS YIELD A UNIQUE DESIGN

I wanted to add on to our home in a way that would maintain the integrity of the original bungalow and honor the memory of our much-used backyard patio, which would be lost to the new construction. The overall concept for the addition developed as a kind of plaza, with two houses facing into it: the tatami house and the original house, each covered in exterior siding, giving an indoor/outdoor quality to the space between them.



Photos taken at lettered positions.

0 8 16 32 ft.

LIGHT BRINGS THE SPACE TO LIFE

Carefully placed windows draw sunlight deep into the addition, illuminating interior details, shapes, and textures. Wherever light enters the space, an equally valuable view extends out.

Large windows strengthen the indoor/outdoor connection, while a thin window in the dining space cleverly marks the transition between the old house and the new addition. Photo right taken at C on floor plan. Photo below taken at D on floor plan.



Connected but separate. Along with matching French doors, the large windows of the main living space offer a nearly uninterrupted view of the patio, fish pond, and yard. Clerestory windows in each gable cast a blanket of light and provide views of treetops near and far. Photo taken at E on floor plan.

office. The tatami room (our new bedroom) is raised several steps above the main living area. Tucked into another corner is a stacked washer/dryer unit that is hidden behind a sliding plywood panel held in place with a simple wooden peg. A counter and hamper sit opposite. This design allows the laundry area to coexist with more-public spaces and also saves valuable square footage.

Another example of this kind of space is the loft, which wraps two sides of the plaza. It allows us to inhabit the high volume of the room and serves as a private

getaway with a small library and its own view of life below.

Softer boundaries also affect the family dynamic. By designing one common space with smaller spaces carved within it, we can be together as a family yet remain comfortably separate, engaged in different activities.

Flexibility and long views make the house work

In a continued effort to keep the house open, I was faced with a huge dilemma: How could I add a private master bedroom and bathroom to the back of the house without blocking views,

light, and access to the backyard? I wondered if a space could be both public and private.

Again, drawing from my experience in Japan, I chose to loosen the idea of “bedroom” and treat it as a space that could accommodate private use at night and other uses during the day. A traditional tatami room offered the flexibility I wanted. Custom-made shoji screens disappear for openness or slide out for privacy while still allowing light to penetrate. This room makes possible long sightlines, which would otherwise have been cut off by a traditional bedroom.

What might have been a solid box is now open, providing a place for sleep, yoga, after-sauna relaxation, or as we have discovered, a stage for our kids. The ability to open this “private” bedroom to other functions, as well as to sunlight, views, and access to the outside, is absolutely essential in making our small house feel spacious.

Similarly, the master bathroom was built along a short hallway leading to the outdoor hot tub and sauna. When needed, the bathroom is transformed into a private area by sliding a frosted-glass door out from behind the



Breaking the barrier between indoor and outdoor spaces. The tatami room's three doors open to the deck and patio, expanding the room's feel. Photo taken at F on floor plan.

toilet. This door does double duty as a cabinet door, covering storage shelves above the toilet when open and allowing access to them when shut.

Hidden storage areas increase space efficiency

Keeping our addition organized is crucial. Typically, opportunities for storage lie under stairs, under roof eaves, above and below window seats, and in other often-overlooked areas. By building thicker walls, you can tuck a bookcase, a linen closet, or a stacked washer/dryer into a hallway or niche.

In our project, I took advantage of as many storage opportunities as possible. By thickening the back wall of the tatami room, I could add a built-in window seat and closet to provide storage for our bed, which is a futon, and clothes. This built-in assembly is below a large storage shelf that holds books and CDs. The attic space above the tatami room, which is accessed by a stepladder and sliding panels high in the master bathroom, keeps sweaters, jackets, and other winter items. Also, three large closets sit below the much-used loft, which has given new

use and easy access to what once was a nearly inaccessible attic.

Outdoor rooms increase usable square footage

On our tight 50-ft. by 130-ft. city lot, efficient use of outdoor space is important. By placing a patio immediately outside the common room and a wraparound deck (known as an *engawa* in Japan) outside the tatami room, doors can be flung open, and

interior spaces can spill outdoors. Similarly, the bathroom is continuous with the garden through sliding-glass doors and a concrete wall that extends out.

By building a fence that surrounds the house, we were able to define outdoor living "rooms." Paradoxically, this fence makes the yard feel larger rather than smaller and allowed us to create intimate gardens between the house and the property border.

In the same way that fences can create a private oasis in the midst of a dense neighborhood, carefully planned windows can edit out the visual clutter of immediate neighbors and focus attention on selected pieces of the landscape. In this way, as the Japanese practice, you can achieve a sense of space as well as privacy both inside and out, with neighbors just feet away. Density need not feel dense. □

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Look for the Magazine Extras section on our home page to see more photos and to hear Tina Govan discuss this project.