



# Form Follows Func

Challenged with a tiny lot and a tight budget, a small house rises to the occasion

BY DARYL S. RANTIS

For many years, the Chicken Hill area of Asheville, N.C., was best known for a large cotton mill that employed many in the close-knit hillside community.

When the mill closed in the 1950s, the neighborhood fell on hard times, but lately, it's become a hot spot for artisans who value its quirky charm and proximity to Asheville's River Arts District.

When a local builder came to me with an idea for an artists' enclave on a small Chicken Hill site, I wondered how we'd fit six houses on a 2-acre parcel of steeply sloping land.

The three-story homes we came up with are a response to the steep site, the small lots, and the tight budget. In addition to providing privacy and 1300 sq. ft. of living space, each home's height provides sunset views over the French Broad River and the Patton Avenue Bridge. The design also minimizes the size of the foundation and the roof, which are among the most costly, energy-intensive parts of a new house.

Unfortunately, the housing market went bust before we could finish all the houses, but we're hoping to build the rest of the neighborhood in the near future.

## Emphasis on privacy

Privacy for the new residents and the abutting landowners is one of the challenges when you're developing infill projects, so we paid very

close attention to how we sited the house and to how we positioned the windows.

In the kitchen, we moved the window that would ordinarily be right over the sink to a spot higher on the wall. The unconventional placement shields the kitchen from neighbors without sacrificing natural daylight. We used a similar tactic in the dining room.

The living room's west-facing patio door is the biggest expanse of glass in the house. The deck it accesses is nearly 12 ft. off the ground. At this height, you get a great view, and you're also hidden from passersby.

We made an exception to privacy considerations with the basement patio door. This ground-level entrance provides outdoor access to the basement artist's studio, which makes bringing in material and removing finished artwork much easier.

## Vertical floor plan

The main floor includes a connected kitchen, dining, and living area to encourage an uncluttered lifestyle and to allow family members and guests to interact during meal preparation. A pair of bump-outs—one in the dining room and one for the main staircase—

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## SPECS

**Bedrooms:** 2, plus art studio

**Bathrooms:** 3

**Size:** 1300 sq. ft.

**Cost:** \$167 per sq. ft.

**Completed:** 2009

**Location:** Asheville, N.C.

**Architect:** Daryl S. Rantis; project architect, Diane Meek; architectural intern, Robert Stenhouse

**Builder:** William MacCurdy

Photos taken at lettered positions.

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## MAKING THE MOST OF A STEEP LITTLE LOT

This tall, narrow house is a good example of architecture influenced by the site. The unique foundation shape and clipped rear corner were a necessity for setback requirements. Bump-outs on the upper floors gain living space in spite of setbacks.



# SIMPLE YET STYLISH

By combining warm, natural materials like native-hemlock joists with modern fixtures and details, the home is an inviting mix of styles that appeal both to modern and traditional sensibilities.



**More with less.** A two-story bump-out provides extra room in the master bath and the dining area. The cantilevered space also provides some visual interest on an exterior wall that otherwise would be rather boring. Because it doesn't touch the ground, setbacks are unaffected. Photos below and right taken at A and B on floor plan.





**Keep it simple.** The combined kitchen, dining, and living areas feature unadorned cabinets and minimal trimwork. The intent was to create simple details that would complement any decorating style. Photo taken at C on floor plan.



**Warm and inviting.** A freestanding gas fireplace provides a focal point for the living and dining areas. The furred section of wall behind the stove hides an angled flue necessary for sufficient clearance for combustibles. Photo taken at D on floor plan.

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provide extra living space and break up large expanses of wall on the exterior.

The upstairs, which has a pair of bedrooms and two full baths, is accessed by a staircase near the front door. A window on the landing provides natural light and aesthetic balance for the front elevation. The finished basement is a large, open space with 11-ft. ceilings. It's meant as an artist's studio, but it also could be a third bedroom, a home office, or an in-law suite.

Designing a small house often involves trade-offs for space. For example, I originally planned a half-bath on the main level. The builder decided the half-bath encroached too much on the living space, so it was eliminated to keep the main floor wide open.

### A mix of styles

The house is best described as a mix of modern and Craftsman styles. It has the clean, contemporary aesthetic of urban architecture while paying respect to the traditional wood buildings of western North Carolina.

Low-maintenance, inexpensive fiber-cement panels cover much of the exterior. The fiber cement is contrasted by locally harvested cypress that gives the house its warmth and beauty.

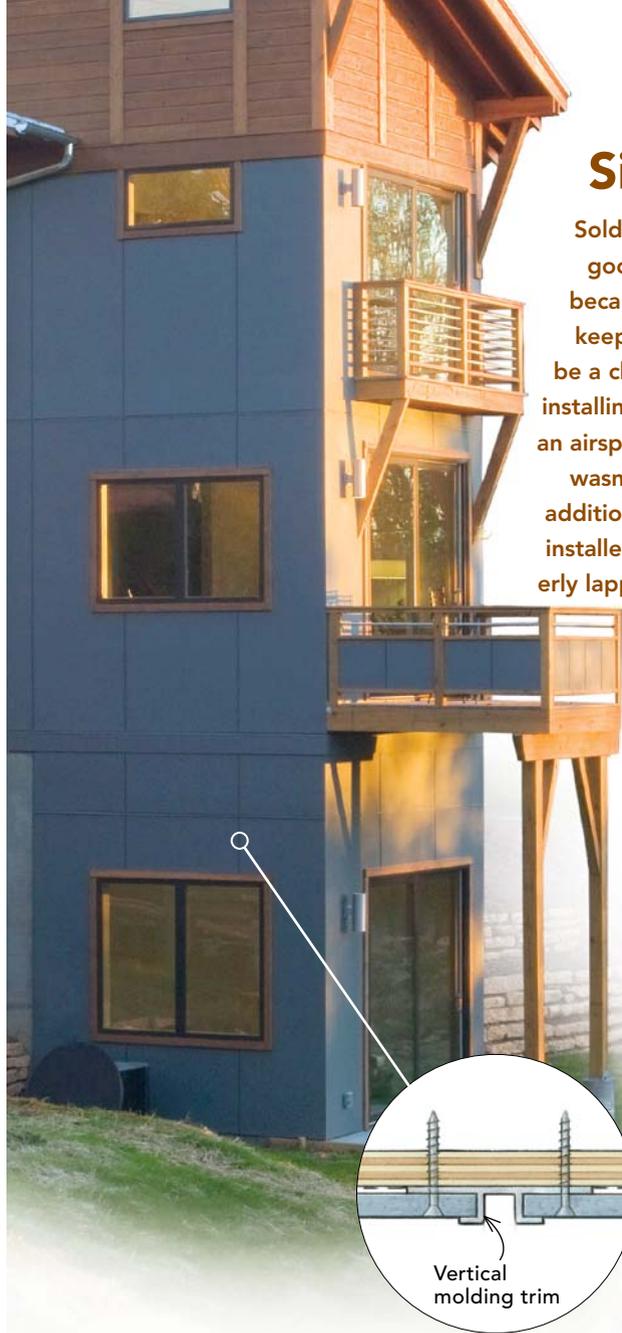
The interior has simple trim details and modern European cabinetry that breaks from traditional Craftsman style. At the same time, wood beams and floors in the living areas pay homage to the home's Craftsman influence and provide a warm, inviting interior.

Interior colors, tiles, and built-in cabinets are unassuming and complement most furnishings, allowing homeowners to personalize the space.

To keep down costs and to make the home affordable for the greatest number of buyers, the builder decided to forgo photovoltaic and solar hot-water panels, but we made the roof pitch and orientation ideal for adding solar at a later date.

At approximately \$167 per sq. ft. for construction costs (not including the lot), the house is targeted to middle-income buyers, one of the few strong housing markets left in our region. □

Daryl S. Rantis is director of design at the design-build firm Green Hammer in Portland, Ore. Photos by J. Weiland, except where noted.



## Siding in sheets

Sold in sheets, HardiePanel siding is good looking and inexpensive, but because it doesn't have natural laps, keeping the building watertight can be a challenge. Although I considered installing the 4-ft. by 10-ft. panels over an airspace, rain-screen style, there just wasn't enough in the budget for the additional time and material. Instead, I installed the panels directly over properly lapped housewrap.

For the vertical seams between panels, I used Fry Reglet ([www.fryreglet.com](http://www.fryreglet.com)) reveal panel trim. This aluminum extrusion has a built-in channel that breaks up the monotony of the smooth surface and finishes the vertical seams. The same company makes a similar transition for horizontal seams, but I found it less expensive to have a local metalwork shop make an aluminum Z-flashing that we used to weatherproof and finish the tops of the panels. Generally, the siding is fast and easy to install, but the window and door openings are a little fussy to detail. With 40 sq. ft. of coverage per panel, it's a trade-off that's easy to justify.

—William MacCurdy, builder

### Flashing detail

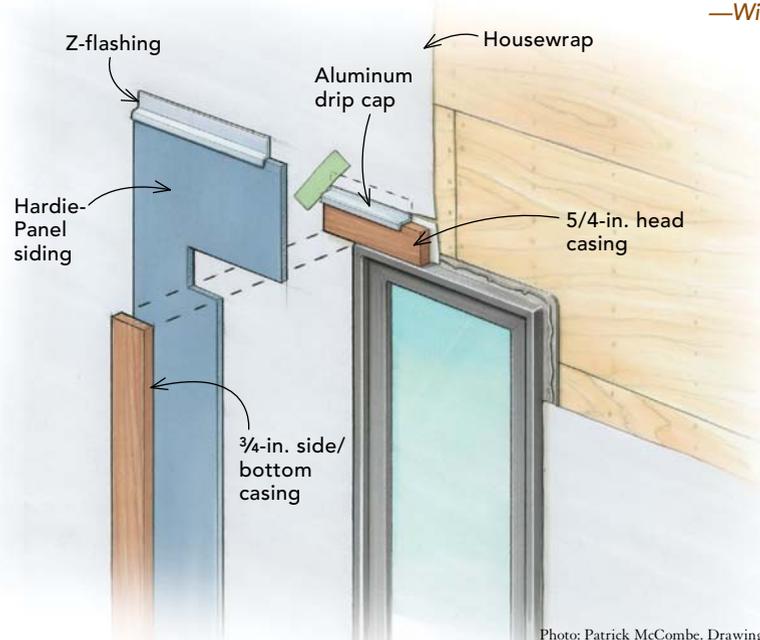


Photo: Patrick McCombe. Drawings this page: Bob La Pointe.