

STYLISH LIVING IN WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA

# HOME

CAROLINA

## + GARDEN

SUMMER 2009

Lisa Apodaca  
(and Raleigh) on her  
rooftop terrace

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# The Cantilever Tales

By Melanie McGee Bianchi

If a house can simultaneously blend in and stand out, Sandra and Barry Bearden's pied-à-terre in progress has nailed that feat.

The couple, whose daughter Sarah attends college in Colorado, spend half the year in Houston and the other half in a condo in Burnsville's private Mountain Air community. It's a familiar story: "We were looking to go somewhere where the weather was cooler, found Western

North Carolina and fell in love," says Sandra.

But their passion comes down to earth with a relatively dainty carbon footprint. When the Beardens' gabled 3,500-square-foot home (also in Mountain Air) is completed in 2010, it

will slant naturally from the hillside in the same manner that high-elevation laurel bushes are shaped by the wind.

Asheville-based architect Rob Carlton talks about his firm's progressive, "site-sensitive" approach, which has included, in the Beardens'

case, a study of the lot's steep topography and dense vegetation.

"The home's design works in harmony with these things," says Carlton. Part of the house, he reveals, will sit on steel piers subtly toned to complement the surrounding landscape. Elevating a structure's frame "makes a minimal level of disturbance on the ground," explains the architect. "It also allows the mass of the home to thin and get lighter and more delicate toward the edges. Conversely, buying a stock home plan or designing the foundation or lower level to mimic the main level can have an overwhelming impact on the land."

Bearden takes a green view too. "We didn't want a basement that had to go the entire length and width of the house—floor space we would never use, but would have to heat and cool," she says. "We were pretty adamant about that, and Rob was able to comply. The core of the house will have a lower level, but the rest of it is cantilevered off."

The Beardens are also deciding which of the many variations of solar and geothermal energy systems they will install. But eco concerns ride tight with aesthetics, and Carlton is proud to divulge some of the design elements that will set the place apart.

"The view is broad and inspiring," he says, "and we were responsive to that." A massive amount of glass, a copper façade (Carlton calls it "a skin") on the front of the building and natural materials selected in a natural palette will distinguish the home while helping it commingle with its environment.

Other detailed enhancements include a top span carpeted with moss and plants. Barry Bearden was reluctant at first. "He said, 'I hope you don't expect me to get up there and mow that,'" Sandra relates with a laugh. But she says her husband came around when he learned that green-roof vegetation is selected to be low maintenance.

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Asheville architect Rob Carlton pushes the envelope with a modern take on "mountain design" for a new house planned in the Mountain Air community in Burnsville.

A different sort of resistance came from the originators of Mountain Air, a two-decade-old enclave whose older homes, while stately, tend to reflect more traditional design elements—for example the lodge-like, dark rusticity that once epitomized mountain getaways.

"I prefer to have light," says Sandra. "I've run up against some people who think that if you go light, you're trying to make it look like Miami. But we were inspired by some of the Pacific Northwest contemporary homes we saw, mountain homes in the woods that were very light, both literally and in atmosphere."

Despite their admiration, the couple was determined to make the Burnsville house completely theirs. Bearden mentions viewing homes in another popular destination—seaside

summer colony Nantucket,—that were admittedly handsome, but too much alike. "We didn't want to build a McMansion," she says. Blending in for them means becoming one with the hillside, nestling their home "among the mountains and the trees."

Pondering the issue of building a new home in an older community, Carlton speaks carefully, balancing his words as he does earth and edifice. The relationship, he acknowledges, can be complicated: "Developers sense a responsibility to existing homeowners, and must reconcile the community's [original] vision with evolving market sensibilities."

The Beardens, he implies, embody a new generation of residents. "Many aspects that are influencing the design of this home are environmentally driven.

This house is pushing the envelope," says the architect, mentioning, among other innovations, a "photovoltaic array"—i.e. a cluster of solar panels—that will be mounted on the ground below the garage.

Some neighborhoods, he says, "will limit creativity in hopes of preserving the established character of the community. And that suppresses an artful approach to design." Inevitably, some turmoil arises.

In the Beardens' case, though, harmony has been sustained. "This project," says Carlton, "has not been without challenge. But in the end, all parties have been able to come together amicably." □

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