



Tranquil Urban Treehouse

A North Carolina couple doubles the size of their airy, urban dream home

BY AMANDA BELL | PHOTOS BY RAY BLACK III

Inside the serene, nature-inspired sanctuary of Alma Blount's home, you'd never know you were steps away from downtown Durham, N.C. "You can feel that airy openness of being in a treehouse, yet you're right there in the middle of everything," she says.

It's no wonder the Duke University professor and her husband, Dave, want to stay forever. Before the \$400,000 renovation turned the 1,300-square-foot space into their dream home, they worried the house was too small for the next chapter of their lives.

The couple hired architecture and construction firm BuildSense to double its size. They now have separate writing studios and a luxurious walk-out patio where they can sit among the trees. Alma shares her home story.

NESTLED IN A GREAT NEIGHBORHOOD

"For many years we lived in this tiny house. We're not rich, but we had plenty of money to build a bigger house if we wanted one. We just couldn't bear to leave our neighborhood. The character is just so special that we couldn't stand the thought of moving anywhere else."

TIGHT-KNIT RELATIONSHIPS

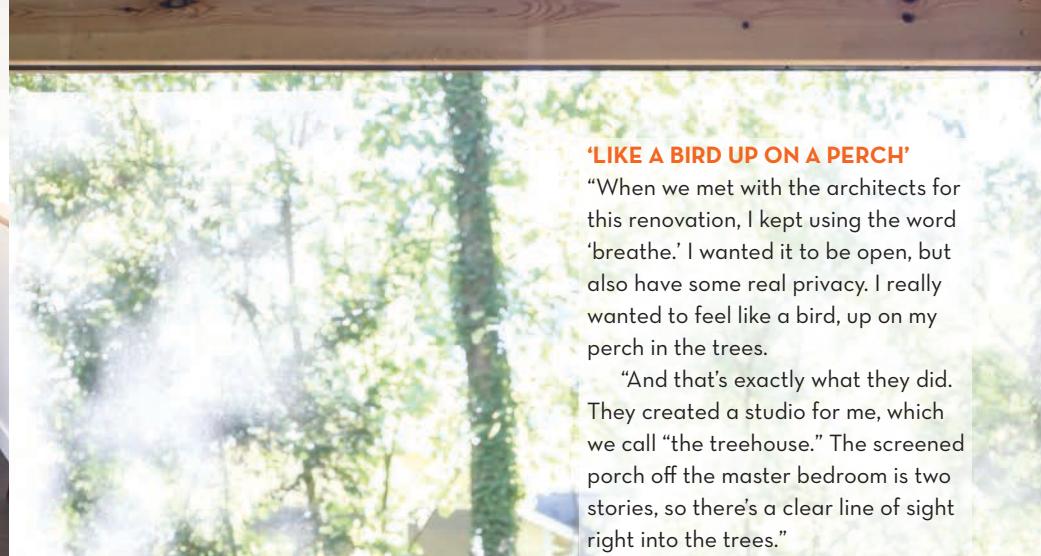
"We had these amazing architects who had close relations with the builders, who had a close relationship with the subcontractors. There was built-in quality control and smooth communication with us throughout the whole nine months of working on our project. Look for a tight-knit firm like that if you can. For this project, having architects who were also builders was [essential]."





SIMPLY BEAUTIFUL SANCTUARY

"My vision for the interior style was simple, comfortable and beautiful. We have furniture with clean lines, serene paintings by local artists that we love and these gorgeous commissioned Tibetan rugs. I wanted the house to feel like a sanctuary, and it does. It feels beautiful in that simple way that's just right. That feeling I don't want to change. We're Christian, but we're big meditators in the Buddhist tradition, and our space is designed as a nice place to have a retreat. It's just so peaceful."



'LIKE A BIRD UP ON A PERCH'

"When we met with the architects for this renovation, I kept using the word 'breathe.' I wanted it to be open, but also have some real privacy. I really wanted to feel like a bird, up on my perch in the trees."

"And that's exactly what they did. They created a studio for me, which we call "the treehouse." The screened porch off the master bedroom is two stories, so there's a clear line of sight right into the trees."

