

the art of living serenely

One of the great joys of creating a custom home is in living with the things that you love. For one Mill Spring couple, that means nature and art. So when Asheville architect Alice Dodson first began designing a new residence for them, the instructions were clear. "They wanted views, they wanted spaces opening into one another, and an uncluttered feeling," she recalls of the discussions with her clients in 2005. Also on the list were high ceilings, quality materials throughout, sympathetic landscaping and plenty of natural light to illuminate the clients' art collection.



BY NORM POWERS | PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVID DIETRICH

In the entry foyer, guests are welcomed by a stunning view and a mixed-media painting by Patricia Cole-Ferullo. On the far wall hangs *Ribbons*, Linda Leviton's wood and copper sculpture. The pendant light fixture of bird's eye maple is by Andrew Muggleton.



Victor Chiarizia's sensuous glass sculpture *Serpenti* is set on a birds-eye maple console table by T. Bayley Wharton. The painting is a mixed-media piece by William Martin Jean.

The result is a serene 4,500-square-foot home on three levels at Bright's Creek, a 5000-acre private equestrian-and-golf community straddling the border between Polk and Henderson counties. Nestled on a 2-acre site half way up Clifffield Mountain, the house sits at 1,700 feet above sea level, set back from the winding road that threads its way to the top of the peak.

True to the clients' wishes, it offers stunning views to the east, north and south from a spacious, functional interior warmed with wood and stone. "It's the most uncluttered house I've ever seen," Dodson says. Clad in brown cedar siding over a framework buttressed with sturdy ironwood and cypress, the house blends graciously into its surroundings, nearly invisible amid the mountain's hardwood forest.

Indoors, generous use of cherrywood, maple and stone further tie the house to its surroundings. A visitor stepping inside is hardly aware of the transition from outdoors but for the reassuring feel of stone tiles underfoot in the entryway. The eye is drawn through the house's central great room, from its 15-foot vaulted ceiling and hand-carved beams to the three-quarter-length windows that form the far wall. Anchoring the space is a hand-laid stone fireplace, dominated by a huge, naturally shaped keystone over the hearth. It forms the base of a freestanding chimney that accentuates the height of the room and the space flowing around it.

That flow gently leads to an open kitchen designed by Dodson, drawing on suggestions from her clients. Polished black granite counters set off the kitchen's cherrywood cabinets and reflect the light from an overhead skylight. The wide central counter containing a Thermador cook top curves outward to offer a convenient perch for visitors, keeping their hostess in the conversational flow.

The interior ecology of the house provides an organic space that allows for both public and private areas, where time can be spent with friends or in more contemplative



A sleek, cherrywood table and buffet by Gary Keener set the tone of relaxed elegance in the dining room. On the buffet, a glass gong by George Cirocco is set in front of William Martin Jean's diptych *Tapestry Series I and II*.



TOP: Polished black granite counters set off the kitchen's cherrywood cabinets and reflect the light from an overhead skylight. The wide central counter curves outward to offer a convenient perch for visitors, keeping their hostess in the conversational flow. BOTTOM: Anchoring the great room is a hand-laid stone fireplace, dominated by a huge, naturally shaped keystone over the hearth. A forged-iron bowl by Susan Madacsi and *Hay Bales*, a glass sculpture by Jeremy Newman and Allison Ciancibelli, sit on a coffee table by Andrew Muggleton. Dale Weiler's bronze *Lonesome Dove* perches on the fireplace ledge.

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solitary pursuits. It's a product of the collaboration between the owners and Bonnie Rash of Hendersonville's Silver Fox Gallery, who guided the interior design of the home. "The owners knew they wanted a space that was quietly beautiful, peaceful, understated and reflective of nature," Rash says.

"They wanted plenty of white space, where they had breathing room for their spirits, and didn't want to feel crowded." Consequently, the furnishings and accessories, from both Silver Fox and markets in Philadelphia, Baltimore and Highpoint, display a palette of muted, organic colors with plenty of natural wood accents. To set the stage, the walls are dressed in a soft sage green.

Artwork is used to delineate the spaces in subtle ways. "We started by taking inventory of the artwork they wanted to bring with them from their previous home," Rash explains. "Then I showed them how they could use that artwork to define several rooms in the new home." The couple already owned two works by Cleveland-based artist William Martin Jean that provided inspiration for the

colors and textures to come. They are now installed in the meditation room on the south end of the house, where the couple spends their mornings enjoying the sparkling light from floor-to-ceiling windows.

Newer works by Jean, including a latticework trompe l'oeil with gold leaf accents from the artist's *Louver* series, grace the dining room. Another piece from their existing collection is a mixed-media work by Patricia Cole-Ferullo, incorporating a brilliant scarlet maple leaf and tree bark — a fitting transitional complement for the entryway. The master bedroom, with its stone-accented bath and two walk-in closets, was designed around a large-scale work by Margaret Scanlan, which now hangs over the bed.

Rash suggested new works to enhance these familiar friends and to further help define spaces. The four corners of the vaulted great room, for example, are anchored by Linda Leviton's sinuous wood-and-metal wall hanging, a large mandala-like ceramic platter by David McDonald, a carved wooden triptych from Larry Fielder and another work by William Martin Jean. Perched on the fireplace

ledge is a delicate sculpted dove by Dale Weiler — a fitting symbol of the room's peaceful ambiance.

"We tried to make sure these works were part of the whole, rather than screaming for individual attention," Bonnie notes. "I would not call the owners collectors, but rather people who surround themselves with beauty and authentic objects so that they will live better lives."

Their days are immersed in that undertaking. Much of the couple's time is spent on the octagonal screened porch forming the northeastern corner of the house. From there, the view spans east over a valley, towards Bright's Creek's Tom Fazio-designed 19-hole golf course. The upper level of the house provides a sky-lit studio for artistic pursuits, but is easily converted to guest quarters when the need arises.

THIS PAGE: The home's master bedroom was designed around the large acrylic *Colorfield* by Margaret Scanlan, which hangs over the bed. Two smaller watercolors from the same series grace the flanking wall. The custom bed is a collaboration between interior designer Bonnie Rash and woodworker Gary Keener. **OPPOSITE:** The master bath offers a serene sanctuary. Linens are from Homestead Linens. Jewelry box by Jim and Trina Bruno.

The lower level features a well-appointed guest bedroom and bath, an intimate library tucked into a corner, as well as a family room and glass-enclosed office.

Outdoors, minimal clearing was done during site preparation and construction by the Asheville luxury homebuilders Morgan-Keefe. House and forest are in an intimate dialogue, the landscaping defined by bark mulch and stone — but no formal lawn. The north/south axis fits gently into the terraced site, with large, roughly dressed stone slabs forming steps connecting the two levels of the terrace.

Despite the challenges of building on a mountainside, the only adjustment that had to be made to the original schematic was the siting of the driveway, which was initially designed to meet the road above the house to the west but

was subsequently moved to the site's inclined southern side. "The owners wanted to be able to drive straight up to the house on a level driveway, instead of coming down to the house from above," Dodson remembers. "But that was the only major change that had to be made in the original plans."

"This was a deeply satisfying job because each time we got it right, the client knew it and appreciated it on a spiritual level," Rash notes. "It's a comfortable and honest place in which to live." To acknowledge the importance of nature and art in their lives, the owners have entertained several of the artists whose work is showcased in their home. "The artists themselves were moved to see how their work honors this place," Rash says. "Or is it how the place honors their work?" ■





"It's the most uncluttered house I've ever seen," says architect Alice Dodson of this serene home in Bright's Creek. Clad in brown cedar siding over a framework buttressed with sturdy ironwood and cypress, the home blends graciously into its surroundings.

