



# A Magical Place

Remember when you were a kid and you imagined the house you would live in when you were all grown up? Of course it would be a big house, high on a hill. You'd have pinball machines and secret passageways—maybe even an indoor slide. Bunk beds, a fort and a big, old play space where you could be as messy as you want—drip paint on the floor and write on the walls—and nobody would care. You'd have your very own movie theater and lots of woods all around you to have adventures in.

Architect Al Platt, interior designer Kathryn Long and Randy Burroughs with Snowcreek Landscape were committed to using indigenous materials in the building and landscaping of the home. A re-circulating waterfall and creek, surrounded by native plantings, intentionally mimic the surrounding landscape. "We wanted it look as if we were just lucky in being able to place this house on a beautiful spot," says homeowner Tom Oreck.

By Kate O'Connor . Photography by David Dietrich



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The Orecks' home captures all the wonder and delight of their children's youthful imagination, factors in a grown-up longing for comfort and ease and sets it all down in an enchanted landscape.



The main floor is anchored by a great room that includes dining and living areas with a connected, but distinct kitchen. To connect the discrete areas of the great room, Kathryn chose a palette of earthy shades, with rich red as the sustaining note.





A red Aga stove commands attention in the kitchen. Arts & Crafts style wormy chestnut cabinets with glass inserts by Wildwood Studio impart a sense of rustic elegance. A tongue-in-cheek oversized iron pot rack by Bill Brown, hung with massive, glass kitchen implements by artist Rick Beck, hints at the lighthearted nature of the homeowners.

But as we mature, our vision of the dream home changes. It becomes more sedate and adult; more practical. Maybe a little, dare we say, boring?

Not if you're Tom and Toni Oreck. The Burnsville home that they share with their three school-age children captures all the wonder and delight of the youthful imagination, factors in a grown-up longing for comfort and ease and sets it all down in an enchanted landscape.

"One of the first things that Tom told me was that he wanted a sense of magic, wonder and surprise for the kids," says interior designer Kathryn Long A.S.I.D., who guided the Orecks in realizing their vision. "'It's the kids' house' was what he said."

And a kids' house has to be functionally kid friendly, from fabrics to floorboards. The main-floor walls are wormy chestnut, the floors reclaimed antique oak. "With these wooden walls, you could hit them with a hammer and you wouldn't even notice it," Tom laughs.

"When we designed this house, we wanted it to be generational. We built it with the idea that our kids and grandkids would continue to enjoy this home and enjoy this special part of the country for many years to come," Tom explains. "So we built it out of materials that, in 50 years, will



look better than they look today."

To accommodate the constant stream of family and friends that the Orecks welcome, architect Al Platt and his son Parker conceived a three-level, tiered structure that sits on a steep rocky slope, presiding over jaw-dropping views. Dividing the tiers by function and creating a series of flexible public and private areas allows for a comfortable coexistence. "You can fill the house with people," says Platt, "but you might not bump into anyone for several hours."

The main floor is grown-up space, anchored by a great room that includes dining and living areas with a connected, but distinct kitchen. A sweep of glass doors and a flanking pair of decks connect the interior with the breathtaking, soaring views. But sitting on the edge of the world can feel





The master bedroom provides Tom and Toni with a peaceful grown-up retreat. The simple, yet sumptuous Bella Notte bed coverings are complemented by artwork from Gallery Minerva in Asheville.

precarious, so Platt was particularly concerned with making the house feel grounded. “It was important that the house have earth connections, since the view is all about the sky and the distance, the big embrace of the mountain ranges,” he says. “The living room has a satisfying coziness and scale. It’s inviting, it’s accommodating, but it’s not grand.”

To connect the discrete areas of the great room, Kathryn chose a palette of earthy shades, with rich red as the sustaining note. The scheme began with a must-have item in the kitchen. “Toni said, ‘I’ve got to have a red Aga stove,’” Kathryn recalls.

“That set all the colors.” Wormy chestnut cabinets with glass inserts in the Arts & Crafts style impart a sense of rustic elegance, and a tongue-in-cheek, oversized iron pot rack hung with massive, glass kitchen implements by artist Rick Beck hints at the lighthearted nature of the homeowners.

That playfulness is allowed free reign one level down in the children’s kingdom. It’s a fantasyland: an expansive playroom (with expansive views) that features furry beanbag chairs around the wide-screen television for free-form lounging, ping-pong, pinball and a unique “tree” sculpture that houses



A fanciful cast iron bed invites sweet dreams in this guest suite. The rocking chair at left belonged to Tom’s great-grandmother. “I have a photograph of her in that chair with my mother, as a baby, sitting in her lap and another of me, as a baby, in her lap,” he says proudly.



The girls’ bedroom is paneled with distressed denim blue walls painted by Lyna Farkas. Giant daisy sculptures bloom above the pastel-decked trundle beds—plenty of room for sleepovers—and an ample window seat offers the perfect setting for whispers and giggles. The wardrobe at right conceals a hidden doorway into a secret room.





The boys' hideaway is a rustic bunkhouse conceived by Phoenix Design, complete with tree-limb ladders, old-fashioned lanterns and a secret lookout. It is a clubhouse worthy of Peter Pan's lost boys—or Davy Crockett.



ABOVE: Iron artist Susan Hutchinson created this whimsical mirror for the bath of the "Moose Suite." RIGHT: Tom's office may seem "all business" on the surface, but he keeps entertainment close at hand. The built-in bookshelves conceal custom-designed drawers for his collection of vintage LP records.



a video display for games, platforms for climbing or nestling and, through a hollow in the trunk, a spiraling tube slide that deposits the passenger in the lower-level arts-and-crafts space.

The children's bedrooms have a storybook charm. The boys' hideaway is a rustic bunkhouse conceived by Phoenix Design, complete with tree-limb ladders, old-fashioned lanterns and a secret lookout. It is a clubhouse worthy of Peter Pan's lost boys—or Davy Crockett.

For the girls, there is a paneled room with distressed denim-blue walls painted by Lyna Farkas. Giant daisy sculptures bloom above the pastel-decked trundle beds—plenty of room for sleepovers—and an ample window seat offers the perfect setting for whispers and giggles.

But the real secrets are reserved for a very special place. Open the door of Wesley North's ingenious wardrobe, push aside the clothes and a hidden door appears. Like Narnia, a private world lies beyond—a sweet, pink-carpeted cubby with low ceilings, a reading nook and a little window for sitting and dreaming.

"This was wasted space beneath the stairwell," Tom explains. "There was nothing underneath, so we dropped the floor and created this secret room for the girls."

Even the guest room on this floor has a whimsical sensibility. "The Moose Room" is decorated in a woodsy motif: tartan bed skirt, twig-work headboard and a wicker moose head above the bed. "I bagged that one myself," Tom jokes.

The fun continues downstairs. Lined with blueberry-hued cabinets, the arts-and-crafts room features mess-proof, sealed concrete floors, stainless steel sinks and tables and a wall of corkboard, dry-erase board for extemporaneous doodling and magnetic sheeting for displaying masterpieces. "I'm artsy...my kids are artsy...so we feel at home here," Toni notes.

Around the corner, another "wasted" space has been transformed into a lavish, velvet-lined Art Deco theater, complete with a stage for homespun productions and a well-stocked concession stand. "This theater was a team project among myself, April Carter of Phoenix Design and Nicolas Butts





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of Audio, Inc.,” Kathryn notes.

Before taking in the feature film, grownups can procure their refreshments in the nearby wine cellar. The climate-controlled chamber has the look and feel of an ancient vault, with faux-stone walls and a heavy, iron-hinged wooden door.

Yet for all its apparent whimsy, the Oreck home is a very practical place. “The house is very tight and well insulated,” says Tom. “We have geo-thermal heating and cooling and radiant floor heat.” The Oecks also installed a “smart house” system, allowing them to remotely control all the major utility functions.

The couple and their design team have also been quite

serious about using indigenous materials in the building and landscaping, engaging local craftspeople for the construction and decorating their home with the work of regional artists and artisans. “I’m deeply impressed with the skill, enthusiasm and imagination of everyone who worked on the house,” says Platt.

It all comes together in a singular residence that honors the space it occupies, the family that occupies it and the generations who will surely enjoy it in future years. And every child who plummets down the slide or hides in the secret fortress tucked under the house will surely say, “This is where I want to live when I grow up!” □







Best friends Rocco and Jeanne Meeker gather under the pergola, the site of many outdoor meals. The pergola has abundant containers of flowering plants and herbs. Behind the large handmade-hinged doors is a spacious "jam" room, always set up for the many musical friends who drop by to play.



# Pergola Paradise



By Kate O'Connor  
Photography by Rimas Zailskas

**“It’s all about the people,” says Linda Constable.**

“My husband and I are gatherers—we love to gather friends together.” And what better place to do that than around the generously sized tables sheltered beneath a pergola at their North Buncombe home?

The space was once dedicated to more solitary pursuits; Linda’s husband, Blair Jones, used the garage and adjoining cement slab to restore vintage automobiles. “But,” says Linda, “we evolved into other interests.” The couple saw the potential to convert the





The depression era farm cottage went through a lengthy renovation, returning its charm. Two porches add to entertaining and resting places.

area into a multipurpose indoor/outdoor space that would embrace their love of good food, good music and good company.

"We were out there one day with our landscaper, Katherine Carter, and we said 'Let's build a pergola!'" she recalls. The inspiration was realized with a metalwork grid, supported by metal posts encased in wood and embellished with ornamental ironwork corners. The sturdy construction was designed to support the wisteria, roses and grapes (from a transplanted 80-year-old vine) that have been planted at its base. "I'm crazy about vines," notes Linda, "and the pergola can handle the weight. Eventually, it will be completely blanketed."

Linda, a designer with Ambiance Interiors, brought her 30-plus years of experience to bear in creating the outdoor kitchen and dining area that are tucked beneath the canopy. She engaged master woodworker Chris Perryman to fashion several movable prep and serving stations from weather-resistant cypress, including a custom cook station designed to accommodate the couple's Big Green Egg: a combination smoker and grill. There are also three ample tables—each more than eight feet in length—that

can comfortably seat more than a dozen guests.

While friends dine on smoked fish or dry-rubbed pork fragrant with fresh herbs from the ceramic pots nearby, they can enjoy the evening's entertainment. The former workshop is now a "jam" room (complete with chandelier and patterned carpets) where Blair—a bass player— and a revolving roster of fellow musician friends are center-stage in this open-air theater, thanks to a series of folding doors that open to the patio area.

As the candles burn down and the music and talk draw everyone into a sense of contentment and ease, Linda finds a deep appreciation for this gathering place. "They say that there's some old Indian vibe about the place. We're true to that. At night, there's something magical about being there in the moonlight, with the stars and the shadows in the pergola," she says with a sigh. "It's truly paradise."







Linda applies the finishing touch to dinner. Beneath the pergola are two custom tables, one of which is home to "the Big Green Egg," a combination smoker and grill.