



Baboolal Residence

CHAPEL HILL, NORTH CAROLINA
ARIELLE C. SCHECHTER ARCHITECT, PLLC

Yes, there are custom residential projects where money truly is no object, but those are the exceptions to the rule. Unless your clients are bitcoin billionaires, there's a limit to how much they can or will spend on their house. Architect Arielle Condoret Schechter, AIA, understands this acutely. Her clients in North Carolina's Research Triangle are ordinary people tired of their ordinary houses, and they trust her to keep their best interests at heart. That drives her to seek out value at every turn on her projects, trying to hit that perfect balance of budget, sustainability, livability, and delight.

"I love working with individual clients and their families," she says. "Many come to me frustrated with their cookie-cutter houses and all the wasted, illogical space. They are never quite right, and there's never enough space where they need it. But that's usually what you get when an architect is not involved."

The clients on this house suffered from just such an experience in their prior house. The function was lacking and the aesthetics were lackluster. They wanted a house that worked for them, instead of against them, and one that serves as a refuge from their very demanding careers in healthcare.

The Grass is Greener

They were drawn to Arielle's work for its environmental awareness and its decidedly modern flair. Their lot was in a typical upscale development with generic "McMansions" on commodious parcels. Although somewhat featureless, the lot was located next to a large septic field that serves the neigh-

Amid a large lot development of McMansions, this modern house is an oasis of modest family living. Its site borrows expansive views across a neighbor's meadow, allowing it to feel larger than its size.





Triple-glazed sliding doors open wide to a large deck, nearly doubling the home's living space in good weather. Restrained specifications for appliances, finishes, and lighting helped reach the building's net-zero goal without busting the budget.



boring “estate” home. Their two-plus acres could live like far more, but it would take skill to unlock its greatest potential.

Not only do many developer-driven houses misplace square footage, they typically misalign key orientations and squander the best views. Getting these aspects right is part of a good architect’s toolkit, but this essential, ineffable value is often overshadowed by the flashy finishes and flourishes available to anyone with a checkbook.

Arielle’s clients, who have precious little time for themselves and their family, have learned to value experiences over things. Therefore, at every turn on this project, she prioritized the qualities of light, views, and building performance over superficial, budget-busting bling. And she harnessed its best quality, the priceless one that cost nothing at all—the broad, sweeping panorama over the protected septic meadow. “We applied the principle of *shakkei*, or borrowed scenery,” she says.

Placing the key living areas and deck to take advantage of the main view to the north and west drove the rest of the orientations and floor planning. “There





were also some views we wanted to back away from, like a big neighboring play structure,” she explains. “To the east, in the winter you can see the development houses, but when it leafs out, you can’t. That was the perfect place for the screened porch. We wanted the kitchen to see the entry and guests coming up the walk, so it’s at the front of the house. And because we wanted the kids’ rooms to be sunny, their bedrooms and playroom face south.”

At just under 2,500 square feet of conditioned space, the house is very efficient in plan. Other program must-haves included a study for the husband, who likes to relax by listening to old vinyl records, and a soothing spa-like bathroom for the wife. The main bedroom suite is its own Tetris-like assemblage, orchestrated to allow one spouse to rise early or return late while on call without disturbing the other. Borrowed light and scenery through a long window cheers the hallway

The clients requested the cantilevered, inverted roof as their big design splurge. The architect flipped roof trusses to achieve the effect without supporting columns.





connecting their bedroom, bathroom, and shared walk-in closet. Proceeding down the hallway is its own act of decompression from the cares and tensions of the outside world.

“The main bedroom is a restful space, a quiet zone with rich, dark paint,” Arielle says. “And the study is away from all the noise of the house at

“[My clients] discovered that it’s not as expensive to go green as they expected.”

—Arielle Condoret Schechter, AIA

the northwest corner. I always like the mudroom right between the garage and the kitchen, and I tuck in storage everywhere I can. The budget was very tight, so I had to consider every inch of the house to make sure there’s no waste. But I do think 2,500 square feet is a real sweet spot for a house.” A guest room did not make the final cut, but it may be added in the future.

Even within its tight plan, the house offers getaway space for everyone. There’s a study where the husband can listen to his jazz records while admiring the view, and cheerful sun-soaked spaces for the young children.





The spa-like bathroom is the wife's refuge from a hard day in the healthcare field. The entire suite is designed to enable the spouses to work on call without disturbing each other. A lengthy hallway puts the bathroom and walk-in closet at an auditory remove from the bedroom.



The one purely design-driven splurge was the cantilevered roof. “The clients had seen another house I did where I had a big, cantilevered roof. They wanted that, but without the columns I used. I had been experimenting with roof trusses, so on this house I inverted them to achieve the 13-foot cantilever over the back deck. Water goes down rain chains to catch basins and then drains safely away from the house.”

Deep overhangs protect the fiber cement and cypress siding and help shade the house, but the cantilever element is more a gesture of shelter than sun protection, says the architect. Triple-glazed window systems from Poland, a rooftop solar array, and a building envelope designed to Passive House standards get the house to net zero. “The windows have a low solar-heat-gain coefficient,

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Chapel Hill, North Carolina

ARCHITECT: Arielle C. Schechter Architect, PLLC, Chapel Hill, North Carolina

BUILDER: Newphire Building, Kevin Murphy, Chapel Hill

LANDSCAPE DESIGNER: Jean Bernard, Petal Stone Landscape Design & Consulting, Carrboro, North Carolina

SOLAR CONSULTANT: Julian Nuñez, Action Solar & Electric, Chapel Hill

HVAC SYSTEMS: Boer Brothers, Carrboro

STRUCTURAL ENGINEER: Brian Moskow, PE, Red Engineering & Design, Apex, North Carolina

PROJECT SIZE: 2,446 conditioned square feet; 222 square feet screened porch; 630 square feet garage; 406 square feet covered deck

SITE SIZE: 2.74 acres

CONSTRUCTION COST: Withheld

PHOTOGRAPHER: Tzu Chen Photography©

KEY PRODUCTS

CLADDING: Nichiha Fiber Cement; stained fine line cypress siding

CUSTOM CABINETRY: Designed by the architect, crafted by Bo Taylor Custom Woodworking, Raleigh, North Carolina

DECKING: Thermory

DISHWASHER: Bosch

ENGINEERED LUMBER: BCI Joists wood I-joists; LVL beams; Glulam beams

ENTRY DOORS/WINDOWS/WINDOW WALL SYSTEMS: Awilux triple-glazed Passive House suitable

FASTENERS: Simpson Strong-Tie

FAUCETS: Blanco (kitchen); Danze (bathrooms); Delta (shower control); Crosswater (tub filler)

FITTINGS: Moen

FOUNDATION: Sealed, conditioned crawl space

HVAC SYSTEMS: Trane 20 SEER variable speed heat pump with modulating zoning system

INSULATION: Open cell spray foam

LIGHTING: Kuzco

LIGHTING CONTROL: Lutron

MICROWAVE: GE

PAINTS: Sherwin-Williams

PHOTOVOLTAICS: 11.4 kW; Axitec and Hanwha panels

RADIANT HEATING: Schluter DITRA-HEAT (main bathroom)

RANGE: BlueStar

REFRIGERATOR/FREEZER: Samsung

ROOFING: Carlisle SynTec Systems 60 mil Sure-White EPDM membrane

SINKS: Lenova (kitchen, mudroom); Dakota (main bathroom)

THERMAL/MOISTURE BARRIER: Tyvek

TOILETS: TOTO

TUBS: Victoria & Albert (main bathroom); Oceana (secondary bath)

UNDERLAYMENT/SHEATHING: Huber ZIP System R-Sheathing

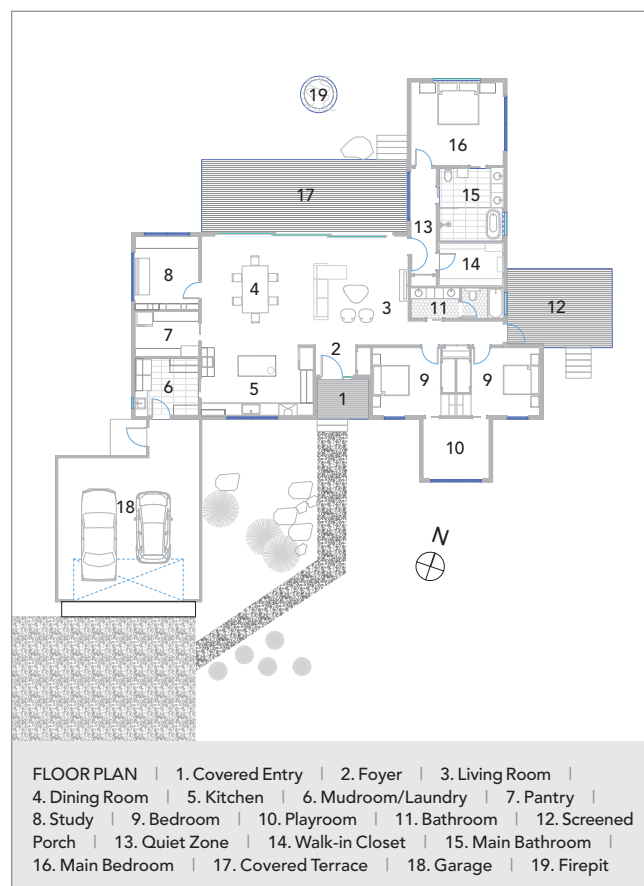
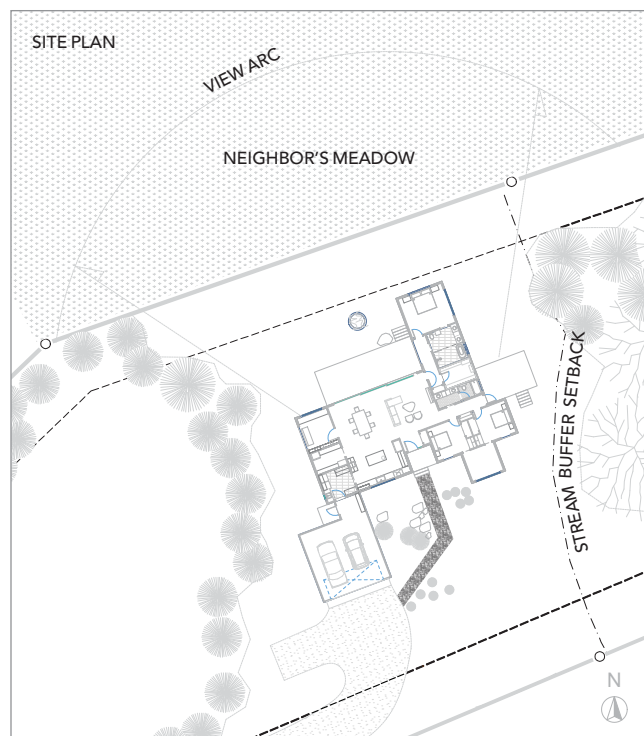
VENTILATION: RenewAire ERV

WALLBOARD: USG Corporation

WASHER/DRYER: Samsung

WEATHERIZATION: Prosoco R-Guard AirDam; Prosoco R-Guard Joint & Seam Filler

WINE REFRIGERATOR: Kalamera





The clients wanted a low-maintenance and low-consumption house so they could focus on relaxing, satisfying life experiences with their family.

so they absorb less sensible heat into the house. And they are as solid as a vault.

“My clients wanted to do a green house and they wanted to save money. They discovered that it’s not as expensive to go green as they expected.” Although this house and many of the others Arielle designs are built to Passive House standards, most clients don’t want to pay the premium to have them certified, she adds. “The process is quite expensive.”

The tight budget guided the choice of stock modern-style garage doors, restrained selections in light fixtures and

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tile, and conventional gutters instead of an integral system for the flat roof areas. “I go with my clients to lighting, tile, and plumbing showrooms,” she says,

“and I am brutally honest about costs.”

Unchecked, the little things certainly can add up, yet it’s square footage bloat that inflicts the greatest penalty. Says Arielle, “I consider all my houses to be on a tight budget. To make them affordable, I have to keep plans tight, tight, tight. But I still have to provide my clients with something spectacular that gives them a lift.”

A swooping cantilevered roof, a sweeping meadow view, and a fully functional family home amount to a mission very well accomplished.

—S. Claire Conroy