

A high-angle photograph of a modern city house with a rooftop patio. The house has grey horizontal siding and large black-framed glass windows and doors. The patio is paved with light-colored concrete and features a white wicker sofa with orange and teal cushions, a matching armchair, and a coffee table. A colorful patterned rug is on the patio. A large brown umbrella is in the foreground, and a smaller one is on the left. A brick building is visible in the background.

Beautiful timing

A new city house makes a
couple's dream come true

BY ERIKA HOWSARE
PHOTOGRAPHY BY
VIRGINIA HAMRICK



Though the home's exterior is quite different from those of the older homes on Ninth Street, there are nods to the vernacular, namely the front porch.

The first time Staci Vinson and Robyn Templeton walked into their house—even though it was still under construction—they had the feeling they'd been there before. “We’d been drawing this house on napkins at happy hours for 10 years,” says Templeton.

The serendipitous part was that Jason Roberson, owner of the design-build company Build-erbeast, had independently been drawing it too. And in October 2015, when he met Vinson and Templeton, he already had it mostly built.

He’d purchased the lot on Ninth Street NW four years earlier; it was an odd animal, mostly empty, with a two-story concrete garage sitting near the rear property line. Officially, this was the main dwelling since it included an upstairs apartment. But Roberson was eyeing up the rest of the lot—plenty of space for a larger house that would sit closer to the street, like others in the neighborhood.

After getting the garage reclassified as an “accessory dwelling unit,” he set about designing a modern energy-efficient home that would, in tandem with the garage, create a courtyard space between. “I wanted opaque street frontage and a very transparent courtyard in the back,” he says—so while the windows are spare on the front façade, the back side has generous glazing.

“We’re kind of beachy, tropical people,” says Templeton, a California native. The dream home she and Vinson had envisioned would let in lots of light and connect seamlessly to the outdoors, and it would wrap in an L shape around a court-

yard and pool. This was exactly what Roberson was building. “We were walking into our floor plan, only better,” says Templeton.

Playful minimalism

The house is clearly different from the older homes in the 10th and Page neighborhood, but it acknowledges them with some details on the street side. “There are nods to the vernacular,” says Roberson—primarily the front porch, though its detailing is modern. Dark gray cement-board siding is accented with a turquoise front door and a striking panel of multicolored reclaimed wood, a motif that repeats throughout the house.

Inside, Roberson worked to create layers of public and private space, starting with the entryway, with its ceiling being slightly lower than the rest of the first floor. “You walk in, but you’re not in the party yet,” says Roberson, who had input from architect Steve Miller. “It’s semi-public.” From this crossroads, a wide doorway opens to the kitchen/living/dining space, or a more intimate hallway leads to the master suite.

Three wide sets of sliding doors along the long wall of the open living space offer a constant connection to the courtyard outside, where Vinson and Templeton installed a pool (also L-shaped) soon after moving in. Transom windows above the sliders let in even more light, and Roberson carefully engineered a smooth transition between the outdoor awnings and the interior ceiling. “I

wanted the awning to be integrated, grown into the building, not an appendage,” he says.

Many of the details aim for cleanliness of lines: a lack of window trim, minimal baseboards, tall narrow windows that Roberson says remind him of Japanese scrolls. Yet there’s a warmth and playfulness here too in the way materials are used. Translucent Polygal paneling softens the light in the stairwell. In the master bedroom, panels of maple and oak plywood on one wall have a distressed finish, while an entire wall of reclaimed wood brings endless interest to the living space. It’s a real mix of woods from Roberson’s scrap pile—“from luxury wood to OSB,” he says.

Shared vision

Vinson and Templeton, who were tipped off by a friend about Roberson’s house project, showed up at exactly the right point in the process. Well, almost.

“All the big decisions were made,” says Roberson.

“Things we cared about—countertops, floor tile—we got to pick,” adds Templeton. She and Vinson could see enough of Roberson’s aesthetic to trust his vision, but there was still room for the couple to make their own mark, too. “For us, the outside was equally as important as the inside,” says Templeton. “We spent a lot of time on the design of the backyard. We wanted it to feel like an oasis,” a place where friends and family could experience something like a beach getaway.

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The couple did request a few changes that meant backtracking slightly on the construction process, but Roberson was game since these were things he would have preferred to do in the first place. The living room, for example, got a fireplace, its surround made of mixed cement board and stone. And the master bathroom was enlarged to include a two-person walk-in shower.

Everything seems to have come together to create the look and feel the couple had dreamed of. Their own clean, cheerful decorating style complements the palette Roberson had used: light-colored bamboo flooring, white walls and touches of wood. And the site itself contributed important elements, especially to the outdoor space.

“Finding a city lot in Charlottesville is virtually impossible,” says Templeton, “and a flat one is super rare.” The flatness of this one meant they really could have a pool, and there were even banana trees already growing along the back of the pool site to help create a tropical feel.

Roberson and his clients agree that the second-story terrace is one of the house’s best touches. It can be accessed by stairs from the ground level, making the second floor theoretically usable as a nearly separate apartment, for which Roberson has already roughed in kitchen plumbing. More importantly for the moment, it gives Vinson and Templeton a choice place to sit and take in the view toward downtown and Carter’s Mountain.

Painted the same shade of dark gray as the house, the original garage—though humble in size and form—is an integral part of this up-to-the-moment design. The couple have set it up as a pool house of sorts, with a ping-pong table and seating. The upstairs still functions as an apartment.

And just by virtue of its new relationship to a larger building, the old structure plays an important role in the protected courtyard that’s so central to Vinson and Templeton’s home. “It creates that hacienda space,” says Vinson. “I can’t imagine this place without it.”

THE BREAKDOWN

2,100 square feet

Structural system: 2x6 walls; truss roof system; LVL headers and TJI floor joists

Exterior material: Hardie lap siding with reclaimed wood accents on deck balustrade and façade

Interior finishes: Walnut door pulls; reclaimed wood walls; shiplapped drywall window returns

Roof: Asphalt upper roof; EPDM flat roof; standing seam awning and porch roofs

Windows: Pella 350 Series

Mechanical system: 55 HERS score Energy Star rating; Fujitsu ducted mini split systems

Construction: 2x6 wall construction; dense pack cellulose insulation; house wrap with all seams taped; CMU foundation on conditioned crawl space.



Builder Jason Roberson reclassified the garage as an “accessory dwelling unit” and created a courtyard between it and the main house. Inside, the homeowners’ clean, cheerful aesthetic melds with Roberson’s palette: light-colored bamboo flooring, white walls and touches of wood.

