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May 2008

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FOR YOUNG PROFESSIONALS, SO
DESIGNER ROBERT BROWN CREATED A
SERENE HAVEN FOR *TRADITIONAL HOME*

couple's night in

Built for Women III Showhouse



BY AMY ELBERT PHOTOGRAPHY BY COLLEEN DUFFLEY PRODUCED BY ROBERT YOUNG



An antique wool rug anchors the living room, which is furnished with a mix of non-matching chairs, a tailored Baker sofa, and a long ottoman. "We used feel-good fabrics with a little texture," says Robert Brown.




Most up-and-coming executives spend long days commuting and working in their offices. So when evening arrives, it's time for young professional couples to unwind and enjoy each other's company in the comfort of home. That demanding daily routine inspired Atlanta designer Robert Brown to create what he calls "more of an evening kind of house."

Colors are muted and "moody," and fabrics are warm and inviting. "We don't have a lot of bright colors; everything is very subtle," he says.

Brown worked with *Traditional Home* editors and award-winning Atlanta builder Pam Sessions of Hedgewood Properties to create a townhouse for a young professional couple with no children. The residence was one of three townhouses in the *Traditional Home* Built for Women III Showhouse at Woodstock Downtown, an eco-sensitive and pedestrian-friendly community in the historic town of Woodstock, north of Atlanta. The 32-acre development includes townhomes, flats above commercial space, single-family homes, parks and trails, and retail and office space.

Married and the father of four children, ages 4 to 19 years, Brown reveled in designing a home for freewheeling young



A walnut pedestal table by Laura Kirar for McGuire echoes the sweep of the curving staircase in the living room. The painting by Korean artist Suk Ja Kang Engles pops against a neutral backdrop of Benjamin Moore Bleeker Beige walls. Left: A wood cabinet from Hickory Chair was painted red for an Asian flair. The top drawer pulls out and folds down for use as a bar and serving surface.



A chocolate-brown sectional and a lounge chair and ottoman by Baker invite relaxation in the family room. **Below:** The sunny breakfast room is furnished with a settee from Lee Industries, a Robert Allen leather armchair, and a wood-topped Henredon table that's suited for dining or paperwork.



professionals. "They're executives who like to travel; they have no kids. It's pretty much the opposite of my life," Brown says with a laugh. But it's the homeowners—even fictional ones in this case—who are the impetus for any design. "We take cues from our clients and cater to their lifestyles," he says.

Because this couple would be at work most days, Brown and his design associate, Lanah Barkley, focused on creating soothing surroundings that would offer refuge in the evenings. "We felt the colors should be restful," he says. "The walls are pretty much a neutral backdrop for collections of art and interesting shapes in the furniture."

Art is an important component in Brown's designs, introducing color, texture, and a personality. Much of the townhouse's art is Asian-inspired, reflecting his fictional client's travels to the Far East as well as Brown's personal interest in China. (He and his wife, Kim, traveled there two years ago to adopt their youngest daughter.) "I'm all about things Chinese, and it was fun to learn more about the culture and bring that into this project," he says. Even so, Brown kept the Asian influences subtle. "I didn't want it to seem 'themey,' to scream Chinese. I figured ▶



Left: Geometric patterns inspired by a zigzag fabric dominate the family room. The fireplace's linear qualities are accentuated by a CaesarStone quartz surround. An LCD-TV from Samsung sits on an adjustable bracket so it can be viewed from multiple areas.

Below: Two tall ebony-stained pantries bookend natural oak and frosted-glass Plain & Fancy cabinets. A pro-style Thermador range anchors the cooking wall, and a warming drawer and combination convection-microwave oven are set into one of the tall pantry cabinets. A pull-out faucet and deep sink are centered on the island, and Ann Sacks backsplash tiles unify the color scheme. Lutron's wireless and programmable AuroRa system adjusts light intensities throughout the house to suit different activities, creating ambience and saving energy.





In the master suite, an Asian-inspired fabric by Michael Devine used on windows sets the mood. Chinese etchings are arranged above the walnut sleigh bed, which is fitted with a Serta mattress.



these clients are travelers and they might have collections, so we added accessories such as a few jade pieces on the cocktail table and ivory calligraphy brushes. We set a bronze cricket [a Chinese symbol of good luck] atop a stack of books on an ottoman in the living room."

The young working couple's lifestyle also affected how the design team furnished the 2,900-square-foot townhome. "We were thinking about how our couple would use the rooms," Brown says. "They entertain casually; they don't have formal dinner parties, so we didn't put a dining table in the area designated as a dining room." Instead, stairs lead from the front entrance on the ground level to what is now an 18x20-foot living room with 11-foot ceilings on the main living level, a spacious area that could accommodate large groups for cocktail parties.

An open staircase to the third level is the architectural centerpiece of the room, sweeping gracefully along a curved wall lined with tall transomed windows. To exaggerate the windows, putty-colored draperies fall from the ceiling to the floor, where hems are allowed to gently crumple. "I like draperies to break on the floor a bit, so these are a couple of inches longer than floor length," Brown says. "It makes the room a little more casual—not too stuffy, not too serious."

A round table nestles into the curve of the staircase, offering a place for keys and mail, and a side chair is covered in a tone-on-tone woven fabric depicting cherry blossom branches. ►



Left: A McGuire dressing table and slipcovered chair by Lee Industries offer a well-lighted grooming station in the master bath. Ann Sacks floor tiles are warmed by an in-floor radiant heat system. **Above left:** Relaxation is ensured in the Kohler bubble-massage tub. The tub also offers chromatherapy—colored lights that illuminate the water. **Above right:** A custom storage and organization system by ClosetMaid keeps clothes tidy in the master suite's walk-in closet. **Below:** CaesarStone countertops and chunky glass sinks top the twin custom vanities. **Below left:** A Hickory Chair settee covered in an elegant gold fabric by Beacon Hill snuggles into a niche in the master bedroom. ➤





Left: An artisan-painted wall covering from Fromental that depicts cherry blossom branches adorns the guest room.

Above: A daybed and side chair upholstered in Beacon Hill fabrics offer comfort for guests. A soft cream-toned Shaw rug warms the room, while an antique runner unifies the palette. **Below left:** Linen draperies edged in red and woven-wood shades from Hunter Douglas provide privacy in the guest bath. **Below center:** Frosted-glass panels screen the toilet area and shower in the third-level guest bath. **Below right:** Oversized subway tiles line the walls of an additional shower in the ground level bathroom.



An antique wool rug on the chocolate-stained oak floors defines the sitting area of the living room, which is furnished with a mix of relaxed armchairs, a sofa, and an ottoman. "The living room is not overly formal," Brown says. To keep a casual attitude, he avoided arranging objects in pairs. "The only pair we have is a pair of lamps." To make it more inviting, "We wanted to break things up with different pieces of furniture." A red-lacquered cabinet and side table add blasts of warm color.

Brown carried the neutral color palette into the combination family room/kitchen/breakfast room, but he livened things >



Above: Designed for flexibility, a room on the ground level can be used as a home office or as a staging area for buffets and outdoor entertaining. French doors open to a patio.

Right: A Kohler wall-mounted walnut vanity with white lavatory makes the small bathroom feel larger, Brown says. A blue grasscloth wall covering from Phillip Jeffries repeats the texture and color of the rug in the adjoining den. Photos of Cambodian market scenes are displayed on the wall.



Robert Brown's fresh take on traditional

"I love taking classical traditional elements and updating them to make them feel more modern," says Atlanta interior designer Robert Brown. One way he does that is by incorporating contemporary paintings, sculpture, and other art into room settings. "Bob loves contemporary art, especially as a foil for more traditional or transitional settings," explains Lanah Barkley, a designer who works with Brown. Art plays such a key role in his projects that he frequently chooses palettes and room arrangements based on a client's collections. In the *Traditional Home* Built for Women III Showhouse, Brown used paintings as focal points or to add warmth and texture against neutral colors in several rooms. The designer's use of calming backgrounds, edited accessories, and colorful original art makes for rooms that are classic, clean-lined, and invitingly casual.

up with a zigzag geometric fabric on a chair and ottoman. "Lanah found this fabric, and it just knocked our socks off," Brown says. We're seeing a lot of geometrics in the marketplace now. The fabric really inspired the whole space."

The fabric's colors—taupe, gold, copper, and chocolate brown—are repeated on furnishings, wood finishes, tiles, and accessories, and the zigzag pattern announces a geometric design theme. "There are geometric designs in the paintings, in the upholstery, and in the horizontal planks on the wall. The room is really a nice study in geometry," Brown explains. The

fireplace was simplified with a sleek quartz stone surround and no mantel. "It's more clean-looking," he says.

Mocha-colored quartz stone tops a large island that separates the family room from the kitchen's work zone. A blend of mosaic tiles in warm earth tones adds muted color and pattern to the backsplash wall. Distinctive pendant lights were Brown's creation: An electrician drilled holes in the bases of inexpensive glass vases and wired them to hold decorative bulbs.

Quartersawn red-oak cabinets in two different finishes—natural with black glaze and ebony—give the kitchen a ▶



traditional artisan look, while the top row of cabinets with frosted glass doors in aluminum frames lightens the mood. The glass-front cabinets have interior lights on dimmers, so they can be illuminated at various intensities.

The adjoining breakfast room provides space for dining as well as another spot for doing paperwork, using a laptop computer, or reading. "I didn't want just a table with four chairs," Brown says. "I wanted it to be more of a multipurpose space." Eco-friendly fabric made from renewable bamboo was used for draperies in the family room and breakfast room. ➤

Top: A table with an iron base and concrete top acts as a bar or serving table, and teak benches with cushions provide relaxed seating on the sheltered patio. **Above left:** A hanging storage system and a rolling cabinet from Gladiator GarageWorks keep sports gear and tools accessible and organized. The floor goes fashionable with a glossy epoxy shield by Rust-Oleum that transforms the garage into an inviting work area. **Above center:** Just steps from the breakfast room is a small deck with a settee and chairs covered in weather-resistant Sunbrella fabric and accented with throw pillows covered in Thibaut fabric. **Above right:** The second-level balcony is sheltered by a graceful awning of Sunbrella fabric wrapped on a metal frame.

Asian and geometric motifs continue on the third level, where the master bedroom showcases a brown-and-cream fretwork fabric on windows. Walnut furnishings, embroidered bed linens, and ivory-colored walls repeat the color theme and keep the mood relaxed. "This room is very bright. It almost feels like you're in a tree house," Brown says.

To create a focal point, he arranged six Chinese etchings in oversized mats and dark brown frames above the sleigh bed. A sea-grass rug underfoot adds texture. "I didn't want the room to be overly formal," he says.

The master bath also has a tree-house feel, with multiple windows and views of the town. "You're up high enough that you can bathe in privacy while looking out over downtown Woodstock," notes Brown. But to ensure modesty and warmth, windows are covered in Roman shades in the same fretwork fabric as that used in the bedroom. Walls were also upholstered in the fabric, creating an enveloping sense of comfort.

His-and-her vanities separated by a walk-in shower are topped with chunky glass sinks, and mirrors are mounted in faux bamboo frames. "I wanted the

bathroom to be very Zenlike as well as functional," explains the designer.

Flexibility was built into the house's design, with several rooms serving multiple purposes. A daybed in the guest room could be used for overnight visitors or as a cozy spot for the homeowners to read or watch TV. The room's design echoes that of the master bedroom, with nailheads on the end of the daybed repeating the geometric shapes of the fretwork fabric. A hand-painted cherry blossom wall covering, an Indonesian basket lamp, and other furnishings reflect the Asian inspiration.

A den on the ground floor is also multipurpose, with a large table that could double as a desk or for serving a buffet. Two sets of French doors open the den to the patio, making the space well suited for a home-based office or for indoor-outdoor entertaining.

A sophisticated wireless lighting system allows the tech-savvy homeowners to adjust light levels throughout the house via remote controls. The system can be programmed so that a touch of one button can dim or brighten lights in one or more rooms to suit a particular situation—from cocktail parties to a quiet dinner for two. Control plates are color coordinated to blend inconspicuously into the walls.

The residence shares a courtyard with several other townhouses, an arrangement that fosters friendships, Brown says. "This couple might not do a lot of formal entertaining, but I can see friends and neighbors coming over to have a glass of wine. You could open the French doors and sit out in the courtyard every evening. It really is a fabulous community." ■

Architect: Lew Oliver

Kitchen designer: Linda Pittam, CKD, ASID

For more information, see sources on page 208

Editor's note: Robert Brown and two other Atlanta designers were asked to create three adjacent townhomes that would suit the needs of different homeowners in Woodstock Downtown. Barbara Westbrook created a home for a young family with children, featured in the March 2008 issue of *Traditional Home*. A single professional woman's home was designed by Scott Laslie and published in *Traditional Home* April 2008. All three townhomes can be viewed at traditionalhome.com.

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