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Clockwise from top left: A watercolor by Tim Gner. White peacocks in John Dransfield and Geoffrey Ross's New Jersey estate. Fermob's Luzbourg bar cart.



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# TRANSFORMING THE

NOT FAR FROM HIS CHILDHOOD HOME, AN ATLANTA BUILDER DISCOVERS A FORGOTTEN TOWN

Text by Ingrid Abramovitch · Photography by Jeff Herr · Produced by Linda O'Keeffe

Warner McConaughey, a builder who restores old houses, grew up in Druid Hills, an Atlanta suburb designed by the landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted. But it wasn't until McConaughey was working on a renovation project in the neighborhood that he noticed a handsome redbrick home. With its decorative half-timbering, steeply pitched roof, and small-paned windows, the house, built in 1928, looked more Stratford-upon-Avon than American Sun Belt. In Druid Hills, with its amusingly Stonehengian name, English vernacular has long been the architectural idiom of choice. After all, this was the setting for Jessica Tandy's Gothic Revival cottage in *Driving Miss Daisy*.

Warner and his wife, Allison, an interior designer, had been searching for a place to raise their young family. They thought they had finally found it, but their hearts sank when they walked through the front door. "The entry was a beautiful groin vault that led right into a wall," Allison says. "The rooms were small, dank, and gloomy." There were 35 doors on the main floor alone. Most of the rooms were painted dark ochre.

A gut renovation might have helped, but that option was out of the question for the preservation-minded McConaugheys. Warner's firm, HammerSmith, has built its reputation on historically sensitive restorations of period buildings. The couple was also determined to



At Allison and Warner McConaughey's Atlanta home, which the couple renovated with Eric Rothman of HammerSmith, Warner's firm, the terrace features Restoration Hardware seating and cushions in a Sunbrella fabric; the floor is paved in French limestone by Walker Zanger. Facing page: In the living room, the sofa, tripod side table, and armchairs are by Oly, and the alabaster lamps are from Circa Lighting. See Resources.

# THE PAST

HOUSE THAT HE UPDATES TO CREATE A NEW IDEAL FOR FAMILY LIVING

remodel according to the standards of EarthCraft House, an Atlanta group that certifies green renovations.

Fortunately, HammerSmith's in-house architect, Eric Rothman, devised a plan to slightly enlarge and brighten the house while respecting its historic framework. The centerpiece was the addition of a centrally located three-level atrium that would stream light through a roof cupola down to a reflecting pond on the garden level. Meanwhile, HammerSmith outlined a series of steps to green the building, from using spray insulation to make the home more energy efficient, to resurfacing the interior walls with all-natural Venetian plaster.

Newly confident, the McConaugheys began a renovation that took more than two years. Period details were restored, including an ornate wood banister that was stripped of layers of paint and stained to a dark finish. The couple retained such quirky features as doorways so low they "make you feel like a giant," Warner says. Any alterations were seamlessly combined with the home's 1920s architecture. A metalsmith was hired to create steel doors that match the original multipaned windows. New floors in the library and living room echo the Indiana limestone mantels, while an outdoor room was designed in brick carefully matched to the exterior.



Even an extensively rebuilt space such as the kitchen retains vintage touches, with glazed white brick tiles, a butler's pantry, and reproduction cargo-steamship lights. But while the bones of the house were left intact, the decor is decidedly contemporary. For instance, the family room has a graphic floral rug, a cocktail table with a shell-inlay top, and a modern sectional sofa.

One of the home's most up-to-date spaces is in the basement, where Allison, whose professional work includes restaurant design, transformed a former wood shop into a wine-tasting room. She had a 12-foot table custom made of reclaimed French oak, the same wood often used for wine barrels. Above it hangs a set of IKEA lamps reconfigured into a light fixture.

The McConaugheys make a point of using every inch of their home. The couple and their children—Zadie, eight; Wilson, five; and baby

Lucy—often take their meals at the dining room's elegant round mahogany table rather than in the kitchen. In the master bedroom suite, a spacious dressing room furnished with a white shag rug and a Louis XVI-style armchair doubles as a private retreat for the adults. "We intentionally carved that out as a place where we could have real conversations at the end of the day and spend time alone," Allison says.

That the McConaugheys have turned their historic abode into a personality-filled family house—and not a starchy period piece—is highlighted by a sly touch they incorporated into their living room. A wall niche is lined with flea-market apothecary jars, each filled with the sand of beaches the couple has visited together, from Zanzibar to the West Indies. "With three children, we don't go to exotic beaches anymore," Warner admits. But just in case, they've left enough room so that one day they can squeeze a few more jars onto the shelves. ■



Clockwise from top left: In the master bedroom, a mixed-media photograph by Pezhman Deljou and an Oly nightstand. The tub in the master bath is by Matteo Thun. The floor of Italian travertine and the mosaic-tile backsplash are both by Walker Zanger, and the medicine cabinets are by Urban Archaeology. Facing page, clockwise from top: Urban Archaeology light fixtures, a Sub-Zero refrigerator, and a Wolf range in the kitchen; the wall tiles are by Walker Zanger. The wine-tasting room's hanging light and table were custom made, and the Eames chairs were found at an antiques market. In the library, a ceiling fixture from Circa Lighting and an ottoman by Oly. See Resources.