

GENERATION ZEN

DUO DESIGN STUDIO HEADS UP A
TEAM OF EXPERTS TO TRANSFORM
A PARIS MOUNTAIN PROPERTY.

/ by **Brendan Blowers** / photography by **Mark Harvell**



Before preparing to improve the world, first look around your own home

– CHINESE PROVERB

Along the back wall, Chinese floral art from The Rock House Antiques in Greenville hangs above an antique Mandarin altar table. In the sitting area, custom furniture, including two swivel chairs upholstered in waterproof performance fabric, is arranged around natural wood tables that bring in the elements of organic design.

“If someone were to drop you here, between the fountains and the fish and the roof tiles, nobody would believe you were in Greenville,” says John Peery, owner of Peery Homes, the general contractor who renovated the 5024 sq ft home that sits towards the top of Paris Mountain.

Purchased by a Chinese businessperson whom the design-build team never met, the complete renovation was conceptualized and largely driven by artist and interior designer Christa Sorauf, co-founder of Duo Design Studio.

The owner’s nephew, acting as his representative, found Christa through Houzz and all communication occurred virtually. While it wasn’t the way she’s used to working with clients, she relished the opportunity to design a home leaning on traditional Chinese aesthetics. “It’s really clean, the lines are beautiful. I love the history of the different dynasties and periods,” Christa says. While Duo Design Studio doesn’t specialize in any one style, Christa admires pan-Asian interiors and likes Chinese-inspired decorative elements and its detailed hand-painted patterns.

Architect Mark Dullea, of Dullea + Associates, was tapped to update the

home for the new owners. It was a property he knew well. “The house was designed as more of a Japanese style when Ben Rook originally designed it for Francis Hipp and his wife. Later Rook purchased it from the Hipps and used the guest house as his studio office,” he says.

It sits beautifully on ten acres, surrounded by nature, water features, a zen garden and an expansive view. “Everywhere you turn, nature is involved,” Christa says.

Its new owner wanted the interior to feel more authentically Chinese and a plan was made to upfit the house for balance and flow and incorporate a traditional color palette throughout. A tearoom was also created by eliminating a closet and bathroom. A feature of Chinese design is honoring the preservation of nature and using natural materials in construction, such as the home’s interior bamboo ceiling.

Mark had been familiar with the project since the 1980s and was excited to work on its next iteration. “Christa got me involved. I did all of the spatial planning. I was able to find extra roof tiles, and bamboo ceiling panels in the crawl space. We wanted to respect what was there,” he says. “I like to

think like a contractor and design like an architect. We transformed the interior to be more in keeping with the Chinese style while respecting the Japanese architecture."

Duo Design was tasked with custom designing teak furniture, selecting upholstery and cabinets. A stunning natural stone tub by Native Trails, which had to be craned into place, went into the en suite bath. Mandarin Antiques in Atlanta was enlisted to source artwork, furnishing and accents like calligraphy brushes and pairs of foo dogs, also called guardian lions.

"We did a lot of research," Christa says. She and her senior designer, Shelby Askins, created room programs and mood boards, sending everything to the nephew to assure accuracy and approval. "The shopping trips were way fun," Shelby says.

While Duo Design sourced beautifully embroidered red and teal silks for upholstery and arranged the

furniture to be feng shui, the ancient practice of arranging objects according to their energy to create harmony in a space, John and his youngest son, James, project manager for Peery Homes, set about reconfiguring the rooms.

Utilizing Mark's architectural renderings, the Peery Homes team repainted every room and fully renovated the primary bedroom and bath and guest quarters. Walls were removed and rooms repurposed. They also replaced and upgraded the smart home system.

James, who was not familiar with some of the Chinese design choices before this project, really enjoyed the process. "The whole vibe of the house is very peaceful and tranquil like it is supposed to be," he says.

The entire experience wasn't always zen-like, however. Sets of Shoji rice paper doors were needed to match existing ones. Authentic Shoji sliding doors are intricately constructed,

[right] Duo Design Studio custom-designed the wood frame for a couch made by Century Sofa. Its lattice motif connects the furniture to the architectural woodwork of the ceiling.

[below] The only thing the stunning exterior required was a fresh coat of red paint on the custom door and updated hardware. The Asian roofline and approach is unlike any residence typically found in the area. The property was designed and landscaped to maximize serenity, reflection, and the preservation of Eastern culture.



Bamboo

A treasured resource, the ancient Chinese referred to bamboo, pine and plum as the "gentlemen in Winter." The bamboo ceiling in this home is not just a sustainable choice, but also a material with spiritual significance.

Red accents

The color symbolizes luck, joy and happiness. It will often be seen playing a key role in traditional Chinese interiors.

Shoji screens

The Japanese room divider has become common throughout Asian decor. It is handmade from translucent rice paper and latticed wood: cedar, cypress, pine or bamboo.

Craft-made

Geometric shapes, fine woodcuts and joinery and woven panels are just a few of the craft elements present in fine Chinese furniture, often finished with floral or nature scenes that can be carved, metal inlay or hand painted.

Minimalism

Interiors are clean and open. Unnecessary objects are removed and everything in the room has either a practical use or deeper meaning. There is an intentional attempt to achieve a balance of energy between objects using the tenets of feng shui.

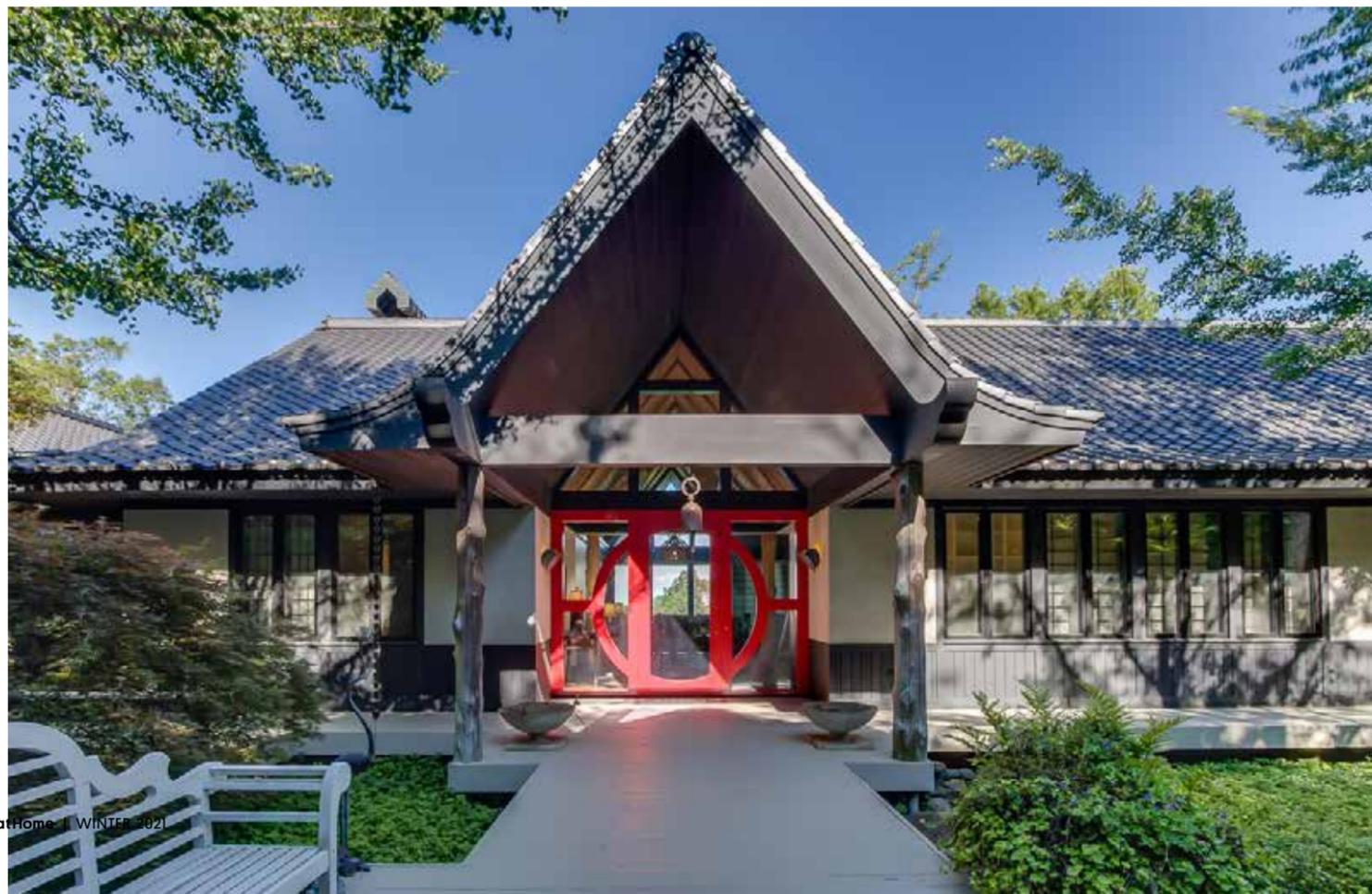
Nature

A commitment to natural materials and creating a seamless flow of nature from the outside to the interior reflects the Chinese belief in preserving and honoring nature. Natural fiber mats and stone are utilized throughout the Paris Mountain home.

CHINESE DESIGN VERSUS ORIENTALISM

Orientalism is the western interpretation or imitation of perceived Chinese or Asian motifs. It is considered an outsider view, though as early as the 18th century it spawned significant theme and variation including Chinoiserie, which immortalized porcelain pattern in fabrications and other tabletop objects, albeit with French and English influence.

Traditional Chinese design is a blend of documented styles going back thousands of years, traced through various Chinese ruling dynasties. Over time, Japanese and other Asian influences became part of the mix but what remains of import is harmony with nature, fine craftsmanship, use of color and space management.





[left] Teak vanities by Kohler provide storage. The sinks are called "Wabi" vessels. The principle of Wabi-sabi is a Japanese aesthetic that finds beauty in something that has natural imperfections.

[right] A natural stone tub from Native Trails had to be craned in, but was worth the effort. After a relaxing soak, the private walk-out deck provides the ideal place to dry off and enjoy the soothing sounds of nature.

“The whole vibe of the house is very peaceful and tranquil like it is supposed to be”

– JOHN PEERY

requiring precise cuts and specific material know-how. “You’re building a pocket for a door that doesn’t exist, hoping you can find it,” James says.

They planned ahead and set up the flooring to fit the doors. He reached out to Rook who put him in touch with the original door’s craftsman. “He was a seventy-five-year-old carpenter and he had the materials stored away in his shop on the backside of Taylor’s Mill that he doesn’t even use anymore,” James says, “He was my saving grace.”

The new doors, which took about three weeks to make, match the

original doors perfectly, as does the five-inch-wide oak flooring James added to the bedroom and tearoom. “It was one of those jobs where you walk away from it and no one can tell you were there,” John says.

Christa agrees. It’s a project that never fails to draw attention on design websites and social media. “It was dream project,” she says, “to work on one of the most unique homes in the Upstate.”

John says Christa was the right pick for the job. “She did a great job figuring out what made the owner tick and fitting their needs.” [aH](#)

