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abode



Style Made Simple

Making an intown home
feel like a vacation house
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PHOTOGRAPH BY JEFF HERR

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The Dressers' entry, far left, opens to the other first-floor rooms. The round table is an old post with a galvanized steel top. Demilune tables with twig legs are topped by mirrors of reclaimed wood. The texture-rich style can also be seen in the family room, left. Above, a Will Corr painting and ladders both serve as art in the dining room.

INSIDE LOOK

Style Made Simple

A builder's Sherwood Forest house takes laid-back cues from vacation homes

by LISA MOWRY

AS A RESIDENTIAL BUILDER, Gary Dresser acknowledges his own home should serve as an impressive showpiece for his work. But showpieces aren't always conducive to family living. So it's not surprising that when Dresser and his wife got ready to build, they found themselves leaning toward comfort.

The couple's favorite homes, they realized, tended to be beach cottages and lake cabins. Their friends' vacation places had more relaxed architectural and decorating styles than their primary residences in Atlanta. "With second homes, people don't build what they're 'supposed to have' but what they *want* to have," Dresser says. "They're usually a little smaller, a little more casual." So for their new house in the Sherwood Forest area, they took a cue from getaway style and went for what Dresser calls a refined rustic look.

Dresser and architect David Fowler came up with a design

that was traditional on paper—living room on the left, dining room on the right near the entrance—but borrowed some features from vacation homes. The floors, for instance, are made from hand-scraped, wide-plank walnut and set the tone for the whole house, says Fowler.

Similarly, the wood trim, beams, and columns are all clean-lined, without a lot of frills or extra layers.

But it's the open floor plan that immediately sets the friendly tone: There are almost no dividing walls throughout the entire first level. "When you walk in a house and you can see everything, it instantly puts people at ease," Fowler says. "Philosophically, that's what welcomes people at a second home: the fact that you're usually not closed off from other people or parts of the house."

Perhaps the most welcoming feature is the loggia, a covered porch with a fireplace directly in view from the front door. It's a place designed for relaxed evenings by the fire, surrounded by stone floors and a rustic roof that feel like a mountain cabin. French doors made of stained cedar are often open between the family room and porch. The whole Dresser family—Gary, Amy, and children Caroline and Nicholas—eats dinner there almost every night.

Dresser found a place for the grill off the kitchen rather than on the porch. "I've noticed with my custom-home clients that the tendency is for people to put too many things in a loggia," he says. "I wanted to keep it basic, with chairs and a fireplace."

Interior designer Laura Walker Baird was another talent in the creative process, collaborating with the Dressers to complete the look. "We've worked together often enough to know that simple elegance is where we are headed," says Baird. "Our thoughts really meshed with the comfortable furniture mixed with antiques and repurposed pieces."

Since their previous house had been more traditional, the Dressers mostly started over with furnishings. They brought a piano and dining room table with them, and Baird was able to put

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The Dressers use the living room as more of a casual music room, with its unadorned fireplace and informal equine artwork by Bonnie Beauchamp-Cooke.

a lighter paint finish on a walnut bed. But other than those pieces, they started fresh. In this new house, the vibe needed to be more relaxed. "Decorating-wise, we were going for casual and durable," says Dresser. "No frilly antiques."

Baird's westside store, Verde Home, specializes in items that have been repurposed or otherwise have an eco-friendly twist. She kept upholstered pieces monochromatic, chose rugs in mostly unifying neutrals, and added accessories and art with interesting histories. For instance, the coffee table in the family room is made of reclaimed wood, and a lamp there was originally a wine jug. The mirrors on the family room wall are old French ironwork that Baird converted by adding glass.

"I try to see objects with an open mind,"



says Baird. "They may start out life one way—such as a balustrade—and end up as mirrors on your family room wall."

The overall look is sophisticated in an understated way, like a pair of designer

jeans. Fowler thinks homeowners are gravitating toward the Dressers' casual yet sophisticated approach. "People are starting to realize that they need to make a house they can actually relax in." ■

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