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## Starting anew

### Building infill homes instead of renovating makes intown living possible for many

BY SUSAN AND RENEE CONTERAS

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We're all tired of long commutes and many of us are moving back into the city. "Many people are seeking out pockets of homes that have been overlooked until now," says Ron McNew of Prudential Atlanta Realty. "Even some neighborhoods that you wouldn't have driven through at noon without a gun in your lap a couple of years ago are now very marketable because people are moving back." Builders are going into the older neighborhoods of Atlanta to gut the interiors of homes and rebuild them, he says. "They maintain the historic look that everyone likes, but homeowners can have modern conveniences. "

Some people take it a step further. When Katherine and Mark Davis decided to marry, he preferred to stay in the Virginia-Highland area where he lived. So they bought the duplex that he rented.

The building needed a lot of work, and the couple soon learned it would be less expensive to tear it down and build a new house than to renovate the existing living space. And the Davises were able to get a little more space and some of the extra amenities they wanted, too.

Their neighbors give them credit for building a house that blends well with other structures on the street. "Our architect was wonderful," says Katherine Davis. "Not only were the house plans beautiful, but the designer also lives nearby, so he knew how to design a new home that fits in an existing neighborhood."

The house is similar to the 1930s era bungalows that surround it, but it has a large kitchen with granite countertops and stainless steel appliances, a master bath with a Jacuzzi, an open floor plan and other modern amenities.

Using every inch of available space is a must for an infill house (a home being built to complement already-existing homes in an older neighborhood). The Davises' floor plan has no hallways and no foyer so there is more usable space. The downstairs bathroom is tucked under the stairs and connects to the library, which also has a large closet, so it can be used as a bedroom or guest room. The master bath is compartmentalized so two people may use it at the same time. The bathtub and toilet can be closed off from the shower and vanity area.

French doors lead from the combined living room/dining room out to a brick terrace in the back yard, which makes the room feel larger. In good weather, the Davises can open the doors to extend the living room outdoors. The front porch can be made more private with lattices to create an outdoor sitting room.

Katherine Davis loves her home, which will be featured in *Southern Living* magazine later this year. She has several recommendations for others considering the same process. "Use an architect. Check all of the builder's references and have a written contract. And be prepared for it to take longer and cost more than the original estimates," she says.

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