

# HOME work

BY STEPHEN FOX



Bailey A. Swenson's Montrose house and studio (Swenson & Linnstaedter, 1958).

**THE CONCEPT OF "LIVE/WORK,"** which gained currency in the consumer market of American lifestyles during the 1990s, reverses a century-and-a-half prejudice against the practice of living and working on the same premises, because it was considered incompatible with middle-class domestic respectability. The success of this ideological campaign can be deduced from the dearth of architectural models of live/work domesticity in Houston, a city that took shape during the last century and a half. Lack of zoning in 20th-century Houston may have meant that dwelling and doing business at the same address was never outlawed by city code. But the restrictive covenants preserving the "integrity" of middle- and upper-income residential neighborhoods in 20th-century Houston compensated by rigorously excluding business activity from the dwelling place, and giving this exclusion the force of law.

Although physicians routinely practiced from their houses in the 19th and early 20th centuries, it was often only the presence of a secondary door that architecturally distinguished the Victorian houses of doctors from those of their middle-income neighbors. Ellen Beasley, in her examination of American urban vernacular architecture, has focused especially on the corner grocery store, a building type that derived its identity in part from its combination of domestic space with the workplace. Much more so than





Site plan for Westbury Square (1960, William F. Wortham, Jr.).

the doctor's house, the corner store stands out as a mixed-use building type. But just as deed restrictions prevented doctors from bringing their offices with them when they moved their families to restricted garden suburban neighborhoods in the 1910s and 1920s, so the transformation of corner groceries into corporate supermarket chains in the 1920s just as decisively separated the place of business from the place of residence. Houston has a few exceptional examples of mixed-use urban building types built in the 1920s, such as Pierre L. Michael's Ironcraft Studio and Isabella Court buildings on Main Street, and the Patio Shops at Almeda Road and Oakdale Avenue, which contained residential apartments on top of ground-floor retail lease space. All still stand, as does the two-story studio/retail/residential building that the photographer Frank W. Schleuter built in the early 1920s at 3617 Main Street, near Michael's buildings. However, for most of the 20th century, the mainstream of Houston commercial building types was as averse to mixing residential and business uses as were domestic types.

Beginning in the 1950s, Houston architects began to experiment with combining the workplace and dwelling. Robert W. Maurice compacted a house for his family into the one-story studio building he designed at 3222 Mercer Street, completed in 1959. The year before, Bailey A. Swenson had added a

slender tower house for himself and his wife, Kathryn, to a former garage-apartment building in what had been the backyard of a large house at 3106 Brazos Street in the South End. Swenson and his partner Herbert Linnstaedter had their architectural studio on one floor of the garage-apartment building, while Kathryn Swenson operated her New Arts Gallery on the other. Such hybrid uses were possible because neither the Maurice nor the Swenson house was constructed in a restricted subdivision. The Maurice Studio and House was in a neighborhood of small office buildings; the Swenson House and Studio was built in an older neighborhood that never had deed restrictions. These conspicuous displays of modernist nonconformity also stood outside the bulwark of conventional residential financing, limiting their potential as models of counter-cultural domesticity. The iconoclast architect building a modern house in a declining older neighborhood (or an unrestricted nonresidential district) ran counter to the dominant ideology of what constituted good practice in community development and housing production in the 1950s. Nonconformity required that clients live/work outside the constraints, and assurances, of conventional market-oriented practices. Such clients tended to be self-employed professionals who had achieved middle-income economic status but had the self-assurance to selectively disregard social norms.



Work faces out, domestic life faces in: 2911-13 Ferndale (1976, Anderson/Wilson Architects).

**HOUSTON'S LACK OF ZONING MAY HAVE MEANT THAT DWELLING AND DOING BUSINESS AT THE SAME ADDRESS WAS NEVER OUTLAWED BY CITY CODE. BUT PRESERVING THE "INTEGRITY" OF RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOODS COMPENSATED BY RIGOROUSLY EXCLUDING BUSINESS ACTIVITY FROM THE DWELLING PLACE.**





The extreme case: Frank Zeni's Tempietto Zeni (1990).



A bridge between home and work: Adams Architects House and Studio (1991).

The market produced at least one unusual instance of live/work in postwar Houston: Ira W. Berne's Westbury Square of 1961. Now partially demolished, Westbury Square was a specialty shopping center deep in the heart of southwest suburban Houston. Berne rejected the strip typology of 1950s shopping centers for a village concept. His concept included constructing apartments on second floors above retail lease space. Although immensely popular during the 1960s, Westbury Square was so singular, and in market terms so non-conforming, that its residential-retail mix was never duplicated.

Like the Tin House Movement, another local architectural trend of the 1990s, the live/work phenomenon started slowly in the 1970s with a handful of examples built at widely spaced temporal intervals. Architects again featured prominently as both designers and clients. William J. Anderson, Jr., and Tom Wilson were the pioneers. Bill Anderson and his wife, Laurence, built a combined studio-residence at 2808 Virginia Street in the Ferndale Addition in 1972, which

they shared with the Anderson/Wilson architecture office at 2806. Since the postwar 1940s, this compact neighborhood on the edge of River Oaks (consisting of two parallel streets, Virginia and Ferndale), had been a place where architects, especially those who lived in River Oaks, built their studios. Karl Kamrath and Fred MacKie and John Staub and Tom Rather built small studio compounds on Ferndale and Virginia, respectively, in the late 1940s. Both the MacKie & Kamrath and Staub & Rather buildings were office buildings only. But their house-like scale and the inclusion of landscaped open space allowed them to fit unobtrusively among the small houses of the Ferndale Addition. By the 1970s, the landscape architect A. Gregory Catlow lived and worked at 2922 Virginia and had a second dwelling unit on the property. And Burdette Keeland had just begun to build a series of unusual townhouses in the neighborhood, as well as radically remodeling an unprepossessing house at 2907 Ferndale for his own family.

Bill Anderson reinforced his own example when he and his wife built a second live/work house at 2911-13 Ferndale, next to Keeland's house, completed in 1976. The Anderson/Wilson architecture office remained on Virginia.

It was Laurence Anderson who was responsible for the work component of the second Anderson House. Her specialty shop, Made in France, occupied a retail space that, from the street, was given more visual prominence than the house front. Bill Anderson turned their house inward to face a spacious interior garden and swimming pool. A huge live oak tree, visible from Ferndale, was the only external clue to the existence of this hidden garden. Anderson's succession of houses in one neighborhood demonstrated the feasibility of combining dwelling with office or retail uses. What made managing conflict between living and working practicable was that the owner-occupants for both parts of the building were the same. Anderson's houses also represented what a live-work urbanism in Houston might look like. This was not a vision of multi-story buildings, with apartments stacked above retail spaces, but an unexceptional streetscape of two-story houses with residential driveways and garage doors interspersed with small businesses, all set close to the street. The nature of

these businesses — two restaurants, several interior designers' studios, the Pooh Corner nursery school, and the French Poodle Grooming Salon — underscored the Ferndale Addition's proximity to River Oaks and the unthreatening character of the mixed-use urbanism that prevailed there in the 1970s, and continues to do so.

In the 1990s, Laurence and Bill Anderson built a third house for themselves in the Ferndale Addition at 2912-14 Ferndale. Larger in scale, less spatially intricate, and more figurally assertive than the Anderson houses of the 1970s, the 1990s house is programatically more complex, since it contains both Made in France and Anderson's architecture studio along with the Andersons' living space. As a third-generation live/work house, the Anderson House represents the durability of this practice in Houston. Yet it also represents the special circumstances typically associated with live/work in Houston: an owner-occupied house and business (where one of the owners is the architect) in an unrestricted neighborhood.

As was also true of the Tin Houses, the early 1990s were a propitious moment for the flourishing of live/work houses in Houston. The real estate depression of the 1980s meant that there was not as much competition from developers for property in centrally located, working-class neighborhoods without deed restrictions as there had been in the 1970s and early 1980s. These neighborhoods, such as the West End, were the kinds of places that looked too marginal to the middle-class mainstream. The clients for live/work houses tended to be architects and artists, people who had the resources to build their own houses and who lacked anxiety about living in ethnically-mixed, lower-income neighborhoods. It was often the affordability of such neighborhoods that made it possible for them to buy and build. Live/work was also an economic necessity: There were no extra resources for leasing work space in addition to building a house.

The artist-architect Frank Zeni built his studio-house, the Tempietto Zeni, in the West End in 1990. Zeni's studio-house represents an extreme case among architect-designed live/work houses in Houston in that it is an



artist's house, and therefore built for an even lower budget and with an even more flexible attitude toward conventions of middle class domesticity than the architects' houses. The tempietto began as a loft, with two levels of platforms spanning above the ground-floor slab. During the past ten years, Zeni has gradually domesticated parts of the house with interior enclosures and air-conditioning, spatially differentiating between its living and working parts. Nonetheless, the Tempietto Zeni stands out for its openness to the climate and its non-conformity. Zeni's outrageous architectural imagery is less and less shocking, though, as the cottages that were its neighbors are demolished for new townhouse complexes that are just as tall and as architecturally extroverted, if not as witty.

Artists' live/work spaces are categorically different from those designed by architects. They tend to be found spaces. The Art Guys World Headquarters on West 22nd Avenue in the Heights, Jim Pirtle's NotSuOh at 314 Main Street in the Kiam Building Annex downtown, the Aurora Picture Show at 800 Aurora Street in a former Church of Christ, and the no longer extant Templo on Feagan Street in the West End, constructed by the collective formed by Nestor Topchy, represent serious counter-cultural examples of live/work, not just because they do away with the living room-dining room-kitchen progression, but because they transgress such ideological fundamentals as privacy and personal possessions. Even when an artist lives in a single-family house, its conversion to live/work tends to make the house more an extension of the artist's work than of his or her work-space. An 80-year-old house in the Rossmoyne Addition has been reshaped internally by the painter Richard Stout to become a mesmerizing spatial extension of his paintings, which involve interiors and landscapes seen in perspective. Stout's house was conceived as singular and interior, not as an implicit architectural model or an urban proposition.

The architectural counter to these artists' examples of live/work is the house and studio that Gail Hood and Joseph Houston Adams designed and built to contain their family and their architectural practice. Completed in 1991, the Adams Architects House and Studio was designed as an explicit architectural

model and an urban proposition. It consists of a pair of three-story buildings on a single corner lot, 66 feet wide and 100 feet long, at the corner of Rochow and D'Amico Streets in the Buffalo Addition. This had been an obscure neighborhood just off the Allen Parkway-Waugh Drive intersection until the construction of Jenard M. Gross's Rincón apartment complex in the late 1990s.

What makes the Adams Architects House so compelling as a model is that it addresses the basic programmatic problems involved in live/work. It joins a house for a family with three children to an office that has to accommodate employees, visitors, and off-street parking. By opening the interiors of both buildings in section, the Adamses created a sense of spaciousness within compact limits (each building is a 32-foot square in plan). By offsetting the buildings on the lot, they avoided having either crowd the other or give the impression that the lot was being overbuilt (which now seems like a quaint sentiment, given what developers have done to the neighborhood). This offset also allowed the Adams to link the two buildings with a low bridge structure: a carport facing Rochow Street and an interconnected set of stairs and decks facing their backyard. The bridge structure enabled them to clearly separate live and work, manage on-site car parking in a way that looks residential rather than commercial, and screen the rear courtyard from the street while facilitating quick access between the studio and the house (the Adams' youngest child was still a baby when the complex was completed). The intelligence, civility, and discretion of the Adams Architects' spatial organization; their ability to increase urban density without annihilating open space, vegetation, and existing setbacks; and the provision of a work place that is publicly accessible rather than an extension of domestic space are attributes that make their house and studio so persuasive as a model of live/work urbanism.

The home office or home studio represents the type of work space most commonly attached to Houston live/work houses of the 1990s. Such spaces distinguish between work and business. They anticipate that business will not be done at home and that employees, customers, clients, and service personnel are not part of the work process. Peter Waldman's



Independent but connected: The Glitsch-Inman House (1998) and Glitsch Studio (2001), Val Glitsch, architect.

house for the artist and medical illustrator Winnifred Hamilton and the writer Edward Snow, built in 1992 in Woodland Terrace, a 1920s-era neighborhood, was designed to provide Ed Snow's primary work space and Winnie Hamilton's home studio within the volume of the house, although at opposite ends of the house's L-shaped plan. Snow's study is a loft overlooking the street as well as the living room. Hamilton's studio is more secluded, overlooks an interior garden, and was designed so that it could be used without air-conditioning. Nearby, in Norhill, the Barcelona architect Pia Wortham and her husband Joan Callis designed a house and studio for Wortham's mother, the artist Elena Cusi Wortham, completed in 1994. The Cusi Wortham House incorporates Elena Wortham's studio in a separate back building, linked to the main house by a covered deck. In these two instances, live/work was feasible in restricted neighborhoods because the work component did not entail doing

business at home; the work spaces were extensions of domestic space.

Val Glitsch designed three houses in the 1990s spatially developed around different interpretations of the live/work condition. The Bennett House, designed for an artist and her husband in the West End and completed in 1992, combines dwelling and work spaces in one building. Glitsch differentiated between the live and work sectors sectionally, volumetrically, and materially, so that outside as well as inside the distinction between the two is clearly legible. Glitsch did the reverse at a house and studio in the 1400 block of Kipling Street in the Montrose Annex Addition of 1997. She sequestered domestic spaces in a slender two-story house at the back of the lot, stationing a two-story gatehouse — incorporating the entrance, garage, guest room, and a studio workshop — at the front of the lot, with an outdoor garden court between the two buildings. Neither of these houses involved doing business at home, although Glitsch leased the Bennett House



when her clients were unexpectedly but temporarily transferred out of Houston, and lived and conducted her practice there until their return. In 1998, Glitsch and her husband, the builder Gary Inman, built a three-story sliver house at 3314 Lake Street, very close to the Ferndale Addition. In 2001, Glitsch added a work component to her homestead: a separate, two-story building that faces Colquitt Street, around the corner from the house. The two building sites adjoin at the rear of the L-shaped lot. Even more than the Adams Architects House and Studio, Val Glitsch's studio maintains an independent identity, yet is easily accessible from her house. Like Bill Anderson, Val Glitsch has had the opportunity to work out variations of live/work arrangements, applying them to different site conditions and different requirements for how the working and living components should relate.

The backyard studio represents another point of access to live/work status. Robert Fowler has designed several back buildings, notably his own architecture studio, located behind his house on West Bell Avenue near the River Oaks Shopping Center. Fowler's studio is a virtuoso fusion of the arts of the geometer, the carpenter, and the sheetmetal contractor. Natalie Appel Architects are responsible for a live/work building that isn't, strictly speaking, a house. The Lowe-Booker Studio of 1999 at Chandler and Parker in the West End combines two studios for the owners — one a sculptor, the other a jewelry maker — with a guest house. Likewise, the O'Connor Guest House at 2214 Fairview in Glendower Court of 2000 by Stern & Bucek Architects combines a home office with a guest house, further expanding the range of live/work applications.

Cameron Armstrong, in the Hart House at 1211 Malone Avenue in the West End of 1999, produced a two-story front building, detached from the house but joined to it by a canopy-roofed walkway. Although designed as an artist's studio, the front building is adaptable for office or residential uses. Armstrong implicitly interpreted mixed-use to mean not simply the combination of non-residential with residential uses, but the ability to use a building flexibly for different purposes as circumstances change. Such flexibility is one of the most attractive characteristics of the live/work phenomenon, and one that, so far, has been tied to the identification of live/work in Houston primarily with houses rather than commercial construction.

Several recent developer-built complexes explore the potential for live/work beyond the scale of the house. Although

the 33-story Houston House apartments of 1966 in downtown Houston, designed by the Washington, D.C. architect Charles M. Goodman, contains several stories of non-residential lease spaces, it remained a local anomaly, much like the Isabella Court or Westbury Square. The implicit lessons of all three are beginning to be heeded. The South End Lofts at Elgin Avenue and Jackson Street in the South End of 2000, designed by Peter H. Brown for Caspian Enterprises, provide living and working spaces for residents in the same building: the work spaces are at sidewalk level, the apartments above. The first phase of Post Properties' three-block Post Midtown Square City Apartment Homes of 1999 by the Dallas architects RTKL, located in the 200 and 300 blocks of Gray Avenue, are consciously based on New Urbanism planning principles. The complex combines a ground-floor layer

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## Zero Commute

Notes for the 2002 RDA home tour,  
April 6-7



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**4409 MOUNT VERNON STREET**  
1995, ALTERATIONS AND ADDITIONS, PHILLIPS-WILD

In 1995, Kathy Wild and Irving Phillips raised the roof on a townhouse that Kathy Wild, an interior designer, had acquired before her marriage to Phillips, an architect. They replaced a free-standing one-car garage in front of the two-story townhouse (designed by the architect Jim Powers in 1973) with a four-story sliver. The new addition contains a second-floor living room, a third-floor study (initially the couple's design studio), and a fourth-floor roof deck and rooftop swimming pool. In 2000, Wild and Phillips bought the adjoining townhouse and converted it into their office and studio, making their dining room the pivot point between live/work.



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**4310 HAZARD STREET**  
1992, RICHARD W. PAYNE, ARCHITECT

Houston's best-known architect/photographer, Richard Payne, designed this compact house to serve as his home, office, photo studio, and personal photo gallery. Set on a busy street and hedged-in by buildings on three sides, the house nonetheless achieves a feeling of seclusion. An adroitly designed front garden court, screened from the street, enhances this sense of isolation. The court is an outdoor room, connected to the inside of the house through large windows yet providing privacy from the street.



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**2122 PERSA STREET**  
1996, TAFT ARCHITECTS

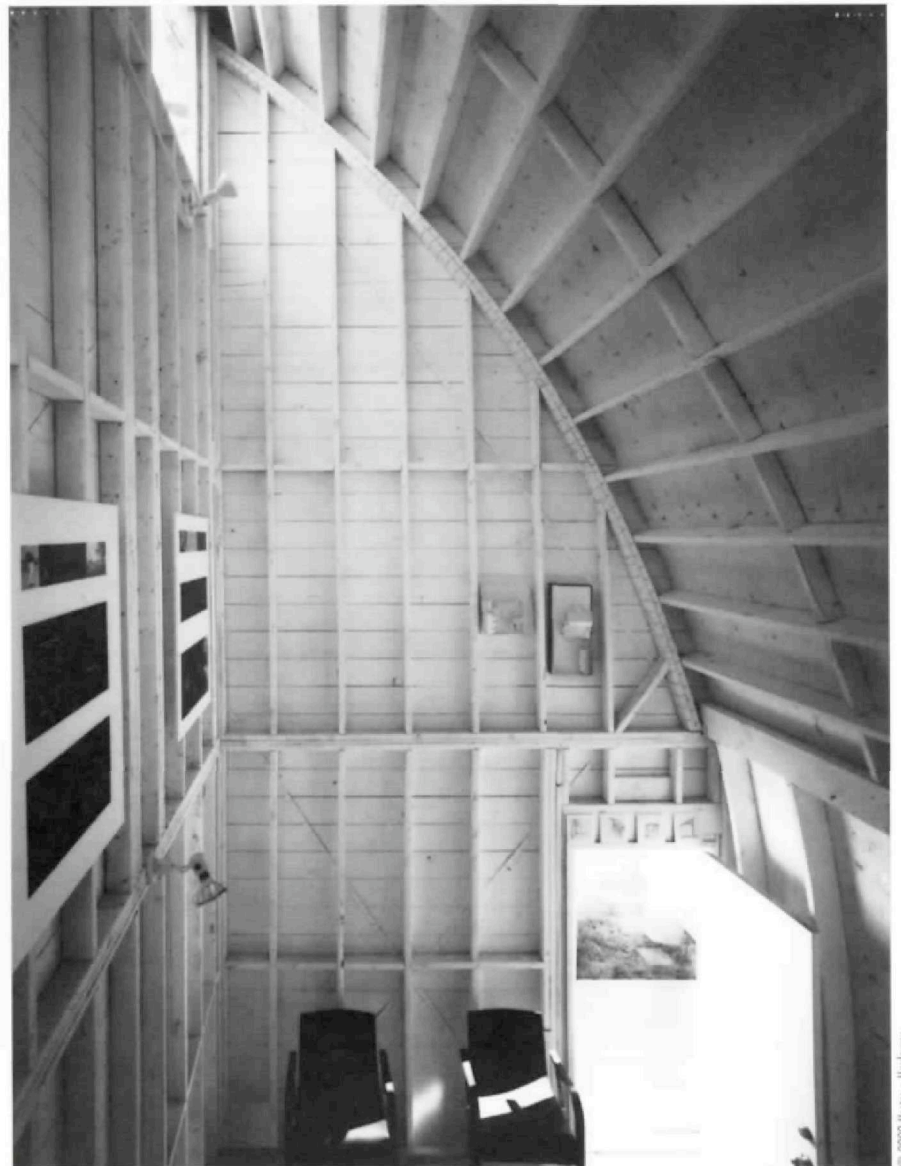
John J. Casbarian and Danny Samuels of Taft Architects architecturally symbolized the vocation of their clients as artists by capping the roof of their two-story house and studio with north-facing skylights and by cladding its exterior walls with zinc and aluminum-coated steel panels, the "tin house" look that in Houston symbolizes "artist." Taft isolated individual studios for the their clients in either wing on the second floor of the U-plan house. The ground floor contains the couple's living space, focused on a central loggia and patio shielded from the street by the garage, with its witty roll-up door of chain link.



of retail, restaurant, and business space with three floors of apartments. By configuring the buildings around sizeable mid-block courtyards, integrating the necessary multi-level parking garages, and designing the public sidewalks as spacious promenades, Post Properties and RTKL outdistanced other developers by bringing something that was genuinely urban, new, different — and “traditional” — to the Houston market.

Live/work as the basis for domestic architecture in Houston is still so limited in application that it can only be described as marginal. Whether the South End Lofts and Post Midtown Square are harbingers of a trend, or whether they will join the ranks of the Isabella Court and Westbury Square as relics of a Houston that might have been, remains to be seen. What this survey demonstrates is the tenuous but persistent tradition of

mixed-use urban architecture in Houston. Architects have played a key role in this phenomenon since they not only designed such buildings but were often the ones who worked and lived in them. Because architects conceived of their houses as potential models and as urban propositions, these isolated examples have made a difference by identifying alternatives to the exclusively residential housing options offered by the market that will work in Houston. Yet in a city that is extraordinarily dependant on the market for determining what kinds of housing are available, the purpose-designed live/work alternative remains the special province of architects, artists, and other non-conformists with the resources to build on their own in neighborhoods that, to most middle-income Houstonians, seem too exposed to the kind of city Houston really is. ■



Interior view, Fowler studio (Robert Fowler).

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619 ASBURY AVENUE  
1996, ROB CIVITELLO/LOCAL ARCHITECTS

Architect Rob Civitello and his wife, writer Tricia Tusa, were able to buy a pair of lots in the West End on which to build their house, which contains a third-floor writing studio. Civitello deftly shaped the house to step, shift, and curve in subtle offsets as it rises to a first-floor living room, carried on steel beams and concrete piers above the ground. Bridging with delicate precision emerges as a theme of the house, with its second-floor steel bridge fabricated by George Sacaris Design Studio, and its rooftop terrace above the floating living room.



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615 ASBURY AVENUE  
1999, ROB CIVITELLO/LOCAL ARCHITECTS

Built next door to the Tusa-Civitello House, this house and studio for a photographer demonstrates how different houses by the same architect can be. The ground floor of the house is one big room, uniting entry foyer, kitchen, eating, and sitting areas. The second floor is divided between a photo studio and office above the entrance and the master bedroom and bathroom. Civitello incorporated architectural artifacts that his client had acquired to give the house a playful yet simple feeling that contrasts with the more complex shaping of space characteristic of his family's house.



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2309 PARK STREET  
2001, NONYA GRENADER, ARCHITECT

Rather than combining living and working in one building, architect Nonya Grenader designed two free-standing buildings on one small lot. The front building is a two-story house containing a spacious top-floor living space in which the owner can shelve his extensive collection of books. The back building is a one-story office building, from which the owner operates a family-owned management business; it is designed to be a one-person work space or to accommodate employees and business meetings. Grenader deftly managed views from both buildings to open the interiors to natural light yet screen them from surrounding buildings.



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1904 DECATUR STREET  
2001, MC<sup>2</sup> ARCHITECTS

Architects Chung and Choung Nguyen designed this live/work house in the Sixth Ward Historic District to respect its setting amid peaked-roofed Victorian houses with front galleries. The house contains two stories of living accommodations. The third floor, with its long distance views of the downtown skyline, is the husband's writing studio. The back yard contains a one-story studio wing designed to eventually contain the wife's ophthalmology practice.

— Stephen Fox