



STAYING

TRUE

GEORGIAN COLONIAL AND GARDENS RETURNED TO ORIGINAL SPLendor

Charles Dunlap and Lee Hart chose the softer texture of gravel (shown on their front walk, facing page, and in their side garden, right), rather than brick pavers, as a nod to traditional European parks and gardens. The rows of trees they planted in the side garden are European hornbeam.

WHEN THEY LIVED IN FERNDALE, CHARLES DUNLAP AND LEE HART WOULD RIDE THEIR BIKES PAST A BECKONING GEORGIAN COLONIAL IN NEARBY PLEASANT RIDGE AND DREAM ABOUT HOW MAGICAL IT WOULD BE TO LIVE THERE. "WE THOUGHT IT WOULD NEVER COME UP FOR SALE," SAYS DUNLAP, AN INTERIOR DESIGNER WHOSE COMPANY, DUNLAP DESIGN GROUP, IS BASED IN ROYAL OAK. "THIS WAS OUR DREAM HOME. I'VE ALWAYS LOVED GEORGIAN COLONIALS, SINCE I WAS A LITTLE KID [IN GRAND BLANC]."



There was even more to love about this particular house, though, than its architectural style. For one, it sits on three lots, which added to the dream – the pair envisioned themselves throwing big parties in the gardens and cultivating tiers of beautiful flowers, plants and edibles under the hot summer sun. Another pull was location: Dunlap, 39, and Hart, 37, were taken by Pleasant Ridge's

idyllic small-town sense of neighborliness. They yearned to stroll along its sidewalks, talking to neighbors and becoming part of the tight-knit community that reigns supreme here.

Luckily for them, their dream came true. One day eight years ago, Dunlap and Hart got a call from a real estate agent friend who knew about their love for the house, and was about to list it for sale. They made a quick offer, and soon, the house – and a quaint small-town life – was theirs.



Above: In the master bedroom, Dunlap juxtaposed the late-1930s Moderne style of a Baker reeded armoire with the more contemporary design of the bed's headboard and the white B&B Italia chaise. Facing page: A similar contrast exists in the dining room, where Dunlap and Hart display their collection of plates adorned with drawings of European architectural masterpieces, such as St. Paul's Cathedral in London.

SMALL-TOWN LIFE IN THE CITY

Tiny Pleasant Ridge is Michigan's smallest community, comprising less than one square mile (0.6 square miles, to be precise), and offers many opportunities for community involvement – a pool, historical society, culinary and garden clubs, to name a few. The town's population was 2,594 as counted in the 2000 Census. A neighbor to hip and modern Royal Oak, Pleasant Ridge is a throwback to mid-20th century America, in which neighborhoods fostered a sense of community and trust.

"It's the kind of community," Dunlap says, "that once somebody experiences the level of closeness between [neighbors], they never leave."

Built in 1936 for a local attorney who lived there until 1992, Dunlap and Hart's new home, a 5,900-square-foot brick and clapboard abode, was structurally in "good shape, but cosmetically, it was a wreck," recalls Dunlap. The process of

making the home habitable was long and arduous. It began with the sunken gardens, which over time had grown over the boundaries of the original neat rectangle. Collaborating with landscape designer Deborah Silver, of Detroit Garden Works, Dunlap and Hart set about bringing the gardens back to what they hoped would replicate the home's original splendor, while also adding the clean, contemporary lines they love.

"The object was to make the gardens look original," Dunlap says.

BLENDING MODERN AND CLASSIC

While the gardens boast open expanses filled with natural scenery, the home's interior is defined by a series of cozy spaces, each with its own character and style. These spaces are linked to one another through careful design threads – such as the repetition of grate-like textures, inspired by a register-grate design



in the men's lounge at the Empire State Building in New York City. Dunlap had the look replicated in bronze metallic tile for the butler's pantry backsplash, and the grid pattern repeats throughout the house in the windows, the American walnut paneling of the library, the woven rattan kitchen chair seats and the master bedroom side panels.

"My style as a designer is all about mixing styles and periods and never really focusing on one style," Dunlap says.

The library is a perfect example of that philosophy, with its traditional architecture and formal bronze chandelier juxtaposed with the contemporary lines of a boxy brown Italian sofa and big leather ottoman that serves dually as coffee table and extra seating. "Quite a lot of people gravitate toward this room," says Dunlap, "because it's intimate and cozy, with the warm wood and the walls being so dark."

Rather than just redecorating, Dunlap and Hart gutted the kitchen and master bathroom when they moved in. The kitchen became a mix of materials and styles, with random-pattern French limestone flooring and horizontal tiles turned vertically for the kitchen backsplash, to give the space some height, Dunlap says. "I wanted the kitchen to feel more Arts and Crafts," he says, "but the



Above: "It's our haven in the summer," Dunlap says of the south-facing screened-in porch. On the coffee table sits a miniature working model of the obelisk that resides in the center of the fountain in Dunlap and Hart's side garden. Facing page: Dunlap (sitting) and Hart in their sunken side garden.

strict geometry ties in with the rest of the home." Standing on wooden legs, the kitchen table's stainless steel top gives the room a reflective, industrial element.

In the master bedroom, which is awash in neutral earth tones, Dunlap mixed 1930s Moderne with contemporary Italian and other styles. The bed is low, with an upholstered linen headboard, and the dressers evoke a sense of drama. A low Italian chaise in the corner matches the bed, while the drapery's grommets and the

steel rods from which the panels hang bring in an industrial feeling that is mirrored in clip-on lamps at each side of the bed.

Other surprises pop up around the house. There's the rust, silver and gold crackled leaf damask dining room wallcovering contrasted against high-tech Italian glass lighting over the long table.

"We wanted the room to feel as though a younger couple had inherited an old palazzo," Dunlap says. In the basement, a media

GARDEN AMBLE

On July 15, Charles Dunlap and Lee Hart hosted the Pleasant Ridge Club's annual outdoor party, inviting 80-some neighbors and their families to mill about their unique tiered gardens, as well as among the sleek, clean-lined rooms of their Georgian colonial home.

The outdoor space begins with a dry-stacked, moss-covered retaining wall, built of Castilla stone they found during the initial excavation of the garden. It had been buried for decades, so it already offered the vintage look Dunlap and Hart sought. At the garden's center stands a 12-foot round fountain with a large Belgian obelisk.

All around is green – European hornbeam, vintage rose bushes, arborvitae – with splashes of color in the form of vibrant container gardens. Black-eyed Susans, tulips, limelight hydrangea, boxwood and myrtle topiary, and lilies grow among the prairie fire crab apple trees. At the back of the yard is an original potting shed, to which the pair hopes to add a conservatory for propagating seeds. Next to that lies the formal cutting garden and raised vegetable bed, surrounded by gravel pathways and fruit trees.

With the garden's precise lines and geometric arrangements mirroring the careful design of the home's interior, it is the ideal setting for a get-together.



room is filled with style, starting with an Italian rosewood bar with a custom grate inspired by two Frank Lloyd Wright metal grates that Dunlap recovered from the demolished Farwell Building in downtown Detroit (the original grates hang on the wall of Dunlap's media room).

Dunlap designed the bar with fabricator Chris Benfield, using existing built-ins and hiding less attractive features behind deep blue velvet draperies suspended by a curtain track. The drapes soften sound elements, while the color and fabric add a textural richness. Down the hall, a former closet became a gravel-floored wine cellar that can hold 1,003 bottles (although, so far, it has only housed 300 at one time).



Above: For the living room décor, Dunlap says he “played off the Georgian colonial symmetry” by placing pairs of things (couches, black leather cube chairs) around the room. He softened the modern geometry with curvy sculpture and a traditional grand piano. Below: A view of the house from the broad, tree-lined street in charming Pleasant Ridge.



REBUILDING THE PAST

“I respected the tradition of the home but added a contemporary edge to the interior,” says Dunlap, who hopes to obtain the original building and architectural records from the daughter of a previous owner. “Since this is a Georgian colonial home, it’s all about symmetry and geometry, straight lines and boxes.”

But Dunlap and Hart agree that architecture and interior design alone do not make a home – or a community. In their neighborhood, the friendly atmosphere adds a touch of tradition that even well-manicured gardens and beautifully decorated rooms cannot create.

“Pleasant Ridge is such a close-knit community,” Dunlap says. “Everybody takes such great care with their homes. And all of these homes are individual treasures to the Detroit metro area.” ■