

C A R O L I N A

Architecture & Design



A Wine Tasting Room
In The Mountains



The owners furnished the master bedroom with a new bed from Stickley; antique side tables by L. & J.G. Stickley; and matching handmade reproduction lamps. Above the bed is a pastel titled "River Shadows" by Coralie Tweed from Blue Spiral 1 Gallery.

art gallery. Gallery owner-director John Cram has represented the Will Henry Stevens estate since 1978. "Stevens was from New Orleans, but he often summered in the Smokies," says Cram. "He loved nature and drew from it, even in his more abstract works.

Samsel's initial concepts for the custom kitchen cabinets evolved during the planning process as well. "Originally, Jim suggested putting clear glass in the cabinet doors," recalls the wife. "I said, 'We've got a lot of Disney cups,' and we decided against having see-through doors."

The owners furnished their master bedroom with a reproduction by Stickley, antique end tables by L. & J.G. Stickley and handmade reproduction lamps. The pastel above the bed, "River Shadows" by Coralie Tweed, came from Blue Spiral. Across the room are two signed L. & J.G. Stickley Morris chairs and a Gustav Stickley antique floor lamp.

With the essential pieces of Arts & Crafts furniture now in place, the couple's shopping trips to the Grove Park Inn

convention will undoubtedly focus on smaller pieces and accessories. "By attending the conference every year, the clients have developed relationships with many of the vendors," notes Nilsson.

"When she asks for help in finding something, they know she's serious."

"They said they wanted traditional," says Samsel, "and English Arts & Crafts came into my mind as the tradition that would work best in Biltmore Forest on that piece of land. It's not what they had in mind, but they were very open-minded about how this house came together. Once I exposed them to it, they got excited about the architecture of the house and ended up with American Arts & Crafts furniture throughout."

"Here's this young couple whose architect lands them in a place they had no idea they were going," says Nilsson. "Once they got their bearings, they said, 'We're here, and we like it.'"

ARTS AND CRAFTS TRADITIONS

ASHEVILLE, N.C.

ARCHITECT

*Samsel Architects, P.A.
60 Biltmore Avenue
Asheville, NC 28801
(828) 253-1124*

ART

*New Morning Gallery
7 Boston Way
Asheville, NC 28803
(828) 274-2831*

INTERIOR DESIGN

*Susan Nilsson ASID/Interior Design
1000 Hendersonville Road
Asheville, NC 28803
(828) 274-4040*

MARBLE & GRANITE

*Mountain Marble & Granite
91 Thompson Street
Asheville, NC 28803
(828) 225-0001*

ROOFING

*Bear Architectural Products, Inc.
149 Helen's Barn Avenue
Post Office Box 2588
Highlands, NC 28741
(828) 526-4190*



The architect designed the turret's light fixture to the ideal scale and dimensions and had it custom-made of hammered steel. The upper landing is furnished with a family heirloom rocking chair and an antique table purchased by the owner's mother. The vase in the niche, provided by Susan Nilsson, is new.

lined wicker shade, so I had it duplicated for the second lamp. I found one of the floor lamps at a booth at the Grove Park Inn conference, and the vendor located the second one for me."

The two American Beauty copper vases by Roycroft were originally manufactured for

the Grove Park Inn. The dresser behind the sofa is a signed L. & J.G. Stickley antique, manufactured by Gustav Stickley's younger brothers, Leopold and John George. Nilsson considers the dining room's signed Gustav Stickley sideboard, the signed L. & J.G. Stickley table and the Gustav Stickley chairs to be

among the most notable pieces in the owners' collection.

The pastel on paper above the sideboard and the one above the dresser in the living room—both mountain landscapes—are by Will Henry Stevens. The owners bought them from Blue Spiral 1, an Asheville fine



The pedestal table in the playroom is a family antique, with chairs by Old Hickory Furniture. The handmade light fixture has a mica shade. The side table pictured in the playroom is a signed Gustav Stickley antique normally found in the dining room.

library rug is also custom-made for the room. The table at the center of the room is a Gustav Stickley antique.

Throughout the library, Samsel provided conduits for computer wiring beneath the floor. "We try to think through the technology issues as we're designing," says Samsel. "This couple wanted to make full use of computer technology, but by concealing the wiring, we were able to give the room more of a library feel as opposed

to a home office."

The library fireplace is Indiana limestone faced with marble from Mountain Marble & Granite, Inc. Hank Strauss, who co-owns the company, also provided an Italian black cleft-slate countertop for the powder room. "Historically, we've oiled slate to darken it, although now we often seal it to maintain the natural color," says Strauss. "For this project, the owners chose the darker oiled finish."

Instead of an ordinary window, Samsel placed a French balcony on the terrace side of the library. "It opens the room up and creates more of a connection with the outdoors," he explains.

Originally, Samsel had planned a bay for the library. By relocating it to the living room, he created the perfect spot for the couple's grand piano. "We like that bay," says the wife. "We think it makes the house."

To connect the living room to the bay, Samsel designed a simple arch. "There was some precedent for using an arch in some of the Voysey work we'd seen, and it makes a nice transition between the rectilinear living room and the bay," says Samsel. "We didn't want to put a lot of wood casing around it and turn it into something heavy."

"A lot of Arts & Crafts homes will have a wooden wainscoting, but this particular living room didn't have much woodwork," explains Nilsson. "The furniture needed to sit close to the wall, so there wasn't room for a chest or table. The solution was to add the screens. They give the room the warmth of wood, the beauty of the craftsmanship and a little sculptural value, and it's OK for a chair to sit in front of a screen."

A 1906-vintage blanket chest serves as a coffee table, while the tables on either side of the sofa are reproductions. On the side tables are matching hammered copper Gustav Stickley antique lamps, while across the room are matching antique floor lamps made by Philip Handel, best known for producing reverse-painted art glass lamps at the turn of the century.

"I found the table lamps at two locations," says the wife. "One had a new, fabric-



Interior designer Susan Nilsson considers the signed Gustav Stickley sideboard, the signed L. & J.G. Stickley table and the Gustav Stickley chairs to be among the most notable pieces in the owners' collection. The pastel on paper above the sideboard is by Will Henry Stevens.

With construction finished, the owners moved into their new house. They had lived there about six months when they decided their furniture didn't suit their new house. "One day, we realized our Williamsburg stuff didn't go at all with this house," recalls the husband. "All of it would have to go." The couple turned to interior designer Susan Nilsson, ASID, for help.

"They had a full collection of magnificent Queen Anne furniture—all good, solid reproductions," recalls Nilsson, "but in this traditional Arts & Crafts house, colonial American traditional furniture was like a sour note. It was out of tune."

In the early years of the Arts & Crafts movement, architects designing in the new vernacular solved similar problems by

designing furniture, hardware and fixtures for their new houses. Gustav Stickley, the leader of the Arts & Crafts movement in America and creator of Craftsman style furniture, designed houses to suit his furniture.

In approaching the interior design project for the Biltmore Forest house, Nilsson says she knew from the outset, "This house was not going to be done in a studio." Instead, the interior design would evolve over time, based on a series of focused consultations and numerous shopping trips, the most important of which would be to the annual Grove Park Inn Arts & Crafts Conference.

Although Nilsson had no formal interior design plan for the project, no set budget and "a time frame based on the client's

decision-making," she did establish general project priorities. "For the more important rooms, we agreed we were going to look for antiques, while the less important rooms would probably end up with reproductions," she says.

When shopping trips failed to meet their needs, the couple designed their own Arts & Crafts-inspired pieces. In the library, Nilsson recalls, the couple originally had one desk and a table. "You need a pair of desks," she told them. "They had to have them fabricated."

Nilsson and the wife designed the matching desk lamps and had them made through a vendor who attends the Arts & Crafts Conference each year. "We started off with a great old Tiffany piece from one of the antique journals," says Nilsson. The



The owners furnished their kitchen with Stickley reproductions. The cabinets and hardware are custom-made for the house.

permitting breezes to circulate. Below the window, the owners grow grapevines on latticework. "The lattice on the connector is there to get something green into the courtyard," notes Samsel.

Perhaps the home's most distinctive architectural feature is the two-story turret added to the front of the house to accommodate a staircase. "The turret wasn't in the original plan," says the wife. "We were trying to find more space for the living room, and my husband came up with the idea to put the stairs on the outside."

"The turret was not part of our original thinking about the stairs, but it really made sense," says Samsel. "We weren't trying to make a grand statement in the entry hall, but the graceful geometry of

the turret gave us a nice contrast to the rectilinear lines."

To add interest to the turret, Samsel designed a subtly curving roof. "I didn't want a straight pitch on the roof," he says. "I was looking for something more complex, with more visual interest."

The roof's complexity challenged the roofer's skills. "A lot of people can put on a flat slate roof, but there aren't that many who can do the sort of intricate geometry you need to cut slate for something like that turret," recalls Samsel. "We had to have it redone at least twice."

Bear Architectural Products supplied the blue-black roofing slate for the project. "The couple looked at samples of Vermont slate, and I showed them an unfading

black Chinese slate as a slightly lower-cost alternative," says company owner Steve Connor. "We're doing quite a bit of Chinese slate now, but at the time, this was one of the first projects in the Carolinas to use it. It's a beautiful roof. It achieved the look they were going for, and the life expectancy on it is 100 years plus."

While the turret's exterior took shape, craftsmen were building the curved staircase offsite in their shop. When they were finished, they delivered the completed staircase by truck and threaded it into the turret, corkscrew-style. "If they'd have made even minute measurement errors, if they'd been off by a quarter of an inch, the staircase wouldn't have worked," said the husband, "but it was a perfect fit."

"Without the planters to catch someone if they fall, the building code would have required a rail around the terrace, and that would have taken away from the appearance," says Samsel.

For the home's exterior, Samsel specified stucco. "I wanted to take advantage of what you can do with stucco," says the architect. "You can mold it to shapes and add levels of detail you wouldn't attempt with other materials."

The stucco's buff color is integral to the material. "The color of stucco varies, depending on the color of the stone or

sand they grind up to make it," says Samsel. "For the size and location of the house, we felt a natural, earthy color would be a nice palette to work in." For the roof, Samsel chose a blue-black slate. The trim is a warm gray-brown.

With graded space at a premium, the architect located the three-car garage facing the front of the house, creating a paved courtyard between. "By putting the parking court and garage on the upside of the house," says Samsel, "we ended up with a protected entry, and the views from the other side of the house are like looking into a forest."

In the remaining graded space, the couple wanted to install a swimming pool. "I lobbied against the pool," recalls Samsel. "That was the only flat land they had left, and a pool requires so much maintenance. But they'd lived in Texas, and that was how they wanted to use the space."

Connecting the garage to the house is a sheltered corridor with French doors that can be kept closed in winter and open in warmer months. "With the doors open, the corridor becomes an extension of the pool area," says Samsel, who positioned windows high on the courtyard side of the corridor to preserve privacy while

The living room combines antiques, reproductions and custom pieces, with the bay containing the family's grand piano as a focal point. The antique Seth Thomas Aztec mantel clock is one of the first things the couple bought for the house. The fire screen below was custom-made from a collaborative design by the architect, interior designer and owners. The wooden screens flanking the fireplace were custom-made to dimensions specified by Nilsson, based on period designs.





The couple designed the matching Mission-style desks in the library and had them custom-made in cherry. The Tiffany-inspired lamps and the rug are custom-made, too. The table is a Gustav Stickley antique.

down to meet you at a lower point as you approach the house.”

Samsel sited the 6,900 square foot house in an elevated back corner of the 2.5-acre lot. Besides preserving the native plants and avoiding the wetlands, the home’s elevated situation provides plenty of privacy and breathtaking views. “We knew we would be shoehorning their program into the lot,” recalls Samsel. “Many of the houses we work with are on deep terrain, and the shallower the house, the easier it is to work with the slope of the land.”

The long, narrow floor plan offered other

advantages, too. “There are opportunities for daylight and views all the way through the house,” said Samsel. “Particularly in the termination rooms—the library and master bedroom on the main floor and the daughter’s bedroom and playroom above—you end up with windows on three sides.”

As plans progressed, the owners asked Samsel to forgo the usual crawlspace or basement and build the house on a slab. “Crawlspaces are nasty things, with problems like radon seepage, frozen pipes and creatures living under the house,” explains the husband. “I wanted a quiet house, too. Footsteps resonate over a crawlspace, but with the slab, our

downstairs is as quiet as a morgue.” Samsel added an inch of lightweight concrete between the playroom floor and the master bedroom below to further minimize noise on the main floor.

With the house set high atop a steep slope, and only a utility room to locate beneath the main level, Samsel used mountain stone to create a covered patio and terrace with a series of planters cascading artfully below. Besides adding visual interest to the terrace-side elevation, the planters allowed the architect to border the terrace with an 18-inch-tall stone seating wall rather than a 36-inch-high railing.

Arts & Crafts-style desk or lamp and having it custom-made.

"We're not purists," says the husband. "If a piece of furniture is the right size, useful, comfortable, and we can enjoy looking at it, that's what we get." Adds his wife, "We enjoy collecting Arts & Crafts antiques, but we don't think of our furniture as a collection."

The couple decided to move from Houston to Asheville about ten years ago, but found early house-shopping visits frustrating. "We had trouble finding a house we wanted, so we decided to build," recalls the wife. The couple contracted with Jim Samsel to design their house.

The building lot they found was part of a newly-developed section in the southern end of Biltmore Forest. The sloping corner property was beautiful, filled with trees,

rhododendron and mountain laurel. The lush vegetation owed its abundance and vitality to the wetlands covering a generous portion of the lot. "We found the only swampland in Biltmore Forest," quips the husband.

In addition to the usual living room, dining room, kitchen and family room, the couple told Samsel they wanted five bedrooms, a spacious playroom for their three children, and a home office large enough for both to work in. As for the architectural style, the couple specified, simply, "traditional."

With Samsel's assurances he could plan a house to suit the property, the couple bought the lot and continued working with the architect, via telephone and fax, on plans. Anxious to relocate from Houston and unwilling to wait until their new house was finished, the couple bought

a house a few miles from Biltmore Forest and moved in.

"The architectural tradition of Biltmore Forest—at least for the nicest houses there—is European-inspired Arts & Crafts," says Samsel, who drew much of his inspiration for the new Biltmore Forest house design from the work of C.F.A. Voysey, a prominent British Arts & Crafts Movement designer.

While inspired by Voysey, Samsel's design is very much his own. "I'm influenced by history, but I like playing with it, too," he explains. "I let the style work to the project rather than letting the project be driven by the style." Samsel notes the tapered chimneys and buttresses as direct references to Voysey's style. "The tapered buttresses help connect the house to the land," he says. "You can also see Voysey's influence in the way the roof really comes

The pool's half-circle shape was designed to fit the available space. Both the master bedroom and the family room open directly onto the pool area. With its French doors open, the garage connector serves as the main entrance to the pool.



When a young couple hired Asheville architect Jim Samsel to design a traditional house to fit a building lot in Biltmore Forest, they had no idea Samsel's English Arts & Crafts-inspired design would ultimately inspire them to spend the next five or six years systematically replacing nearly every piece of furniture they had.

With the transformation of their furnishings essentially complete, the owners themselves have been transformed into knowledgeable, discriminating collectors of American Arts & Crafts antiques—although they're not above buying a reproduction or designing an



The wide overhangs and tapered buttresses (above and at left), intended to reinforce the structure's visual connection to the earth, are typical of English Arts & Crafts design. The painted steel overhang supports were custom-made for the house.

The planters below the terrace add visual interest to the steep slope and eliminate the need for safety railings. Instead, the architect provided a stone seating wall.



A S H E V I L L E , N . C .



A R T S & C R A F T S
T R A D I T I O N S

JIM SAMSEL, AIA
Architect

SUSAN NILSSON, ASID
Interior Design

PAUL JEREMIAS
Photography