

Acworth home debunks theory about 'showplace' houses

Artistic space created a 'house that could be lived in'

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In a gated, golf course community where the houses easily top 10,000 square feet, it's easy to be dramatic. Along the winding roads, past perfectly landscaped islands and yards, are elegantly elaborate houses with towering white columns and dramatic turrets.

Then there's the one with the bluish-green sculpture of a frog — grinning with a glass of wine in his hand — on the front porch. It's as massive a house as many of its neighbors, with stacked stone, cedar shake shingles and brown shutters. But there's a warmth that comes from the porch swing, the baskets of kids' shoes by the front door and that smiling frog.



Bob Andres/Staff

(ENLARGE)

The Arvids (from left,) Thomas, Christopher, 4, and Vanessa sit on the steps while Jimmy, 6, plays guitar.



Bob Andres/Staff

(ENLARGE)

For foyer lighting, Arvid had a glass artist blow glass, and had his electrician hang them at the heights and locations he wanted.

This is the home of artist Thomas Arvid, his wife, Vanessa, and their two young boys. It's big, more than 10,000 square feet, and it took more than two years to build, but it was never created with "showplace" in mind. Instead, chief design influences were a rambunctious family, parents who want to stay put and a love of art and wine.

"Vanessa and I found this Craftsman-style plan and saw how it needed some improvement so it wouldn't be too harsh," said Arvid, who is widely known for his wine-related paintings. "We wanted it to be solid, not grand, and it needed to be artistic."

Before they moved in, the couple made a few major changes. They extended a porch across the back of the house, overlooking the golf course. They took a third garage away to make more functional space, including an oversize laundry room with two dryers; a mail station; a drop zone for books, bags, boots and coats; and a kids' bathroom. They finished the terrace level with a stone patio and a two-bedroom apartment, complete with kitchen and living room. And they added Arvid's studio above the garage.

Throughout the grand scale of the house are softening touches. In the soaring two-story foyer, it's the 10 pendant lamps of varying lengths dangling from the tray ceiling. It's the melted-butter yellow on the walls and the bright white of the detailed trim work. It's in the plush carpeting of the bedrooms and the dark woods of the main living areas. It's a panel of soft curtains around a triple Craftsman-style window. It was all a part of the plan to make the house a livable space.

"I panicked when I saw this floor plan," admits Vanessa Arvid.

"We were in a 4,500-square-foot house before, and I was sure I'd feel overwhelmed. But we use every bit of space here."

Much of that space is devoted to the Arvids' two children. "It seems that in most houses today, kids have their own rooms, and the rest of the house is a showplace," said Thomas Arvid. "Here, they have as many places to run around in and have fun in as we do."

But giving them free range also meant making a few concessions: painting the wainscoting and doors of the halls a deep eggplant that doesn't show fingerprints or scuff marks; allowing the screened porch to be an outdoor playroom; and turning the second-floor media room into a kids' haven, with scaled-down bookcases they can reach, a mini-drum set and a plasma screen for video-watching only. Their presence is felt in almost every corner, from the slate-topped, kid-size table and chair on the patio, next to the adult table; or the row of photos showing their smiling faces across a wall of the master bedroom. Their shared bedroom and bath is a boys' delight: Twin trundle beds designed as sailboats float in a room of nautical blues. Even the bathtub sits in a wood frame that forms a boat.

As much focus was put on art as on the children. "I wanted something neat to see in each room," said Thomas Arvid. And that doesn't necessarily mean a spot-lit signed piece of framed art. In the living room, it's a huge fireplace that takes up most of one entire wall and the red wine-bottle cushion in the corner of the sofa. It's the stacked stone wall around the fireplace in the keeping room, or the wood-topped island and the commercial-grade stove in the kitchen.

The combination of kids and art collide in the children's craft room, a first-floor bedroom space with a coffered ceiling that has been outfitted with built-in storage shelves to hold supplies. White wainscoting climbs up three-quarters of the walls' height and is finished around the top with a magnetic strip from which the boys hang their latest artistic creations. The carpet is a collage of alphabet numbers and letters in a splash of colors.

But there is plenty of grown-up art as well. One of the first things that draws the eye inside the front door is a large painting in vivid colors. Just beyond the screened porch, a giant bowl made of brown scrap metal turns into a firepit in chilly weather. On the lower level, a wall of ink caricatures depict family and friends posing with wine glasses. In Vanessa Arvid's second-floor office, a wall is lined with black-framed paintings created by her son's pre-school class. Another wall holds a painting of Raggedy Ann done by her mother.

Above the garage, Thomas Arvid's studio is crowded with pieces in progress. (The studio also has a coffee maker, small fridge, a bathroom, a few acoustic guitars and a ukulele that provide work breaks without Arvid leaving the room.)

With a thought to growing old in the house, the Arvids added several features that make that possible. Each of the three levels has a master bedroom and bath, so they can be on the same floor as their children now but can opt for more distance later. There's an elevator for effortless moving between floors. And there's the important component to every stage of their lives: a 7,000-space, well-stocked wine cellar.

"The most important thing," said Thomas Arvid, "was having a house that could be lived in."