

# Southern Accents

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# Cliff-hanger Rescue

*New Life for a Victorian Residence*

Architectural Renovation by Thomas A. Blount, AIA  
Interior Design by Suzanne B. Allen and Company  
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The placard tacked to the front door of this Atlanta residence read 'Condemned Dwelling—Danger—Do Not Enter' and the bulldozer brigade was poised to raze the deteriorating structure. But all was not lost. Like two Indiana Jones characters, Atlanta antiques dealer Joe Blount and his business associate,



ABOVE: Constructed in 1910, this simple Victorian residence in a midtown Atlanta neighborhood once served as a boardinghouse for women. Antiques dealers Joe Blount and Luis Garcia have lovingly restored the home and added a contemporary section at the rear. Landscape architect Dan Franklin planned the low-maintenance grounds.  
RIGHT: Leathery crimson walls warm a cozy library. An 18th-century Baltic narrative painting hangs above a Victorian chesterfield sofa with Clarence House upholstery and pillow fabric. Suzanne B. Allen and Company designed the classical lacquered coffee table. An early 19th-century English portrait graces the mantel, while a Victorian fire screen and a helmet-shaped coal box ornament the hearth.









Luis Garcia, stepped in literally hours before the impending destruction and rescued the house. Undeterred by the renovation challenge that lay ahead, the two envisioned a splendid future for the plain Victorian residence with rangy wrap-around porches on both floors and not a speck of gingerbread.

The two-room-wide structure, built in 1910, is located on a tree-lined street in a midtown neighborhood that homeowners are proudly reclaiming. And what a slice of his-

tory this house has witnessed. Atlanta had a housing shortage some thirty years after the residence had been built, and the dwelling was partitioned into eighteen rooms. By the 1950s, it had become a respectable boardinghouse for women, but during the hippie era, it began to decline with the neighborhood, and only the intervention of these dedicated homeowners saved the structure from oblivion.

The metamorphosis began with the help of architect Tom Blount,

the owner's brother. First there were the monumental tasks of removing partitions, tearing out plaster, applying Sheetrock to the walls, bracing the floor, and installing new plumbing and electrical wiring. A spacious square room just inside the front door became the entrance hall, and molding was added above several doorways here to equalize their various heights. In the dining room, a fireplace was replaced with a built-in buffet.

At the rear of the dwelling, the

*OPPOSITE: Topped with an antique Italian papier-mâché bust of the Emperor Constantine, a birch Biedermeier secretary circa 1830, dominates the entrance hall. A Regency chair from William Word Fine Antiques complements the lines and inlay of the massive piece.*

*ABOVE: An early 20th-century Aubusson carpet from Travis Antiques and a table skirted with Brunschwig & Fils textured cotton edged with silk from Rose Cumming introduce complex patterns in the dining room. French chairs are from Franya Waide Interiors. A built-in granite serving table, flanked by closets and topped with cassolles from Travis Antiques, replaced the room's fireplace.*



architect designed a contemporary, two-story addition incorporating a stair hall and a kitchen embellished with Roman Ionic columns. A skylight in the towering loftlike hall admits vast sweeps of sunlight. Re-shuffling spaces meant losing one room upstairs and gaining two baths and four closets to supplement the shallow storage areas. Blount also designed a new garage apartment at the back of the property

Suzanne Allen, a designer with an

eagle eye for tailoring and a flair for combining unusual fabrics, assisted the men with color choices, fabric selection, and furniture placement. Allen envisioned crimson for the cozy library off the entrance hall—in this case a vivid Chinese red, rag-rolled with a purple overlay, then varnished, giving the walls a rich, leathery look.

Floors in the entrance hall, dining room, and kitchen are painted with a flat white wash, contributing to the

light, airy look of the interior, and the ten-foot ceilings gleam with a high-gloss white. Crisp illumination emphasizes the shiny trim, while subdued ceiling spotlights single out accessories and paintings above mantels and turn furnishings into focal points. Plantation shutters also contribute to the home's openness. "Adding curtains to a house with porches off almost every room would have made it even darker," explains Garcia, who appreciates



ABOVE: In the den, end tables display English brass urns converted into lamps, a 19th-century Guatemalan santo (left), and a "dressing" saint (right). The Italian artist di Marchi fashioned the Venetian mask above the window. A rain hood from the rice fields of Thailand is displayed near a George IV man's chair (right). The coffee table from Wynfield House holds a basket of Guatemalan gourds.

OPPOSITE: Varied textures and materials distinguish the owners' imaginative accessories. A carved, painted Indian figure stands between a pair of English armchairs whose pillows are covered with fabric from Fonthill. English fly rods and a Balinese mask are positioned on the wall above antique hand-colored shell prints.

the shutters' low maintenance too.

Neither modern nor traditional, the decor stresses English furnishings, selected with an eye for quality and form. The decorator and her clients found the Victorian chesterfield sofa for the library in the West Country of England and recognized its superb lines despite the fact that its springs protruded through shredded upholstery. While driving past a shop in Brighton, England, during a buying trip for their antiques business, Blount and Garcia were bedazzled by a Swedish Biedermeier secretary in the window. "Seeing it on the English coast was odd," Blount recalls. "It was Swedish, and it was probably the only piece in that style in Brighton, but I knew it was right for the house."

Even more than the furnishings,

accessories give this Victorian residence its distinctive stamp. English fly rods, an antique Guatemalan santo, a fifteenth-century Persian vase, and a Thai rain hood, among other accents, introduce an astonishing range of materials, textures, and subtle earth hues. Though the rooms are far from stark, they reveal a definite lack of clutter. The men go through the house from time to time and ruthlessly clear the decks.

Their joint decorative venture is a harmonious collaboration of talents. Garcia often finds unusual accent pieces, whereas Blount tends to gravitate toward larger pieces of furniture. "Accessories aren't my strong point," Blount is quick to admit. "There are so many of them, and they are so small!" Blount leans toward earth tones, whereas

Garcia is more attracted by color.

Guests tend to congregate in the expansive kitchen. Impressed by sleek European appliances, Blount selected a white cooktop, microwave oven, and television set to carry out the pristine color scheme. Carved and painted Guatemalan animals and artwork, including a carved pig from a French carousel, add vivid flashes of color.

One day last spring, Ruth McCollough Schnell, a former resident, paid the men an unexpected call. Her father had built the house, and she remembered playing on the stairs and beneath the branches of the water oak in the backyard as a five-year-old. What a delight to find this comfortable old home snatched from imminent destruction and lovingly restored. ◇



ABOVE LEFT: Flanked by 19th-century Chinese ceramic figures, a painted mirror designed by Allen pays homage to an ironwood Philippine altar table in the master bedroom. Rattan Chinese Chippendale chairs echo the earth hues and textures of the vignette.

ABOVE RIGHT: Fabric from Hinson and Company decorates the bed, and an Egyptian bronze figure converted into a lamp graces a table designed by Allen. The Victorian chaise is covered in Silk Dynasty fabric.

OPPOSITE: In the sparkling St. Charles kitchen, Roman Ionic columns from Worthington Group and Spaghetti chairs from Innovations in Contemporary Furniture demonstrate a compatible blend of the old and new. Faucets from Friedrich Grohe and Franke graphite sinks are among the gleaming appurtenances. A "dressing" Virgin Mary—a painting by Alvar—and carved Guatemalan animals furnish appealing accents.



