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# Austin Power

A TWO-TIERED RENOVATION  
OF AN UNUSED GARAGE CREATES  
A DOWNSTAIRS PEEK INTO AN  
UNDERAPPRECIATED GARDEN  
AND AN UPSTAIRS VIEW  
OF THE TEXAS SKY.

The renovated dining room/library steps up into the remodeled original living room; the new long axis of the house continues into the old garage, now a guest wing that leads to a new entry below the roofed-over second-story deck. "James had a vision for opening up the house," says architect Mell Lawrence, "and that also allowed us to balance the way light and views were introduced."



renovation is usually a once-in-a-lifetime experience—and some might say once is enough. But for James David and Gary Peese, renovation is the status quo. “We are constantly under construction,” remarks Peese about the house he and James David share in Austin, Texas. “People are always asking, ‘Is this ever going to end?’” he continues, “and the answer is no.”

That’s because David loves change. As a landscape architect and co-owner with Peese of Gardens, an Austin-based shop, nursery and landscape-design firm, David is a virtuoso at searching out exotic and wonderful plants, furniture and oddments and mingling them into his clients’ lives—and his own. “I change out the front garden at our house 12 times a year or more,” he says. So renovating the house every now and again doesn’t seem all that foreign to him.

The David/Peese house sits at an angle to the hilly street and is approached in stages, first across a Zen-ish swath of raked pea gravel and then through a lavish congregation of plants. Well-weathered stucco with a red tile roof, the home is the product of a succession of local architects. James Coote designed the original 2,000-square-foot building in 1979; Paul Lamb undertook the kitchen, terrace and guest-house addition in 1988. Recently, David and Peese asked Mell Lawrence to renovate again.

“There was one end of the house that was not being used at all,” says the architect. He suggested expanding the four-room house by 25 percent, adding a much-needed extra bedroom, bath, hallway and walk-in closet downstairs and a bathroom and an open dining porch upstairs.

PRODUCED BY DORETTA SPERDUTO AND HELEN THOMPSON. PHOTOGRAPHS BY JONN COOLIDGE. WRITTEN BY HELEN THOMPSON.

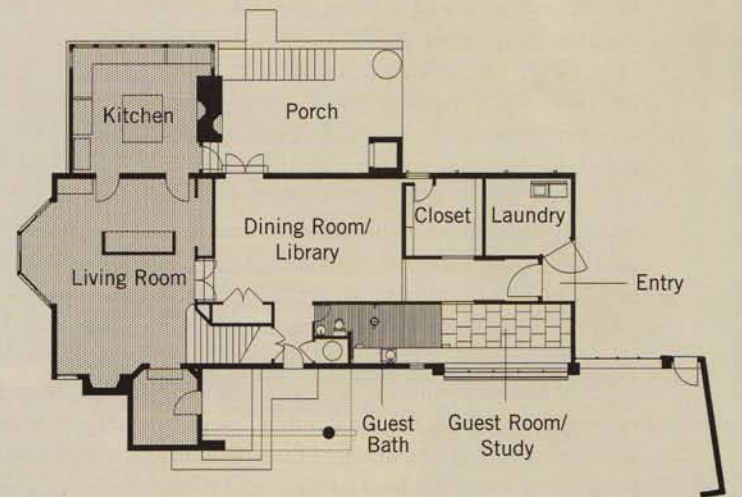
The architect and clients ignored the widely held belief that numerous finishes compete for attention and make small spaces look smaller. The quirkiest aspect of the renovation is that there is no wall between the bathroom shower and the adjacent study/guest room. In fact, the cement shelf at left (below) runs the whole length of the joined rooms.





#### WHAT THE PROS KNOW ABOUT Wet Spaces

"Drainage is crucial," says contractor Don Crowell, who opted for a fiberglass-lined concrete pan underneath the slatted-teak shower floor. The pan sits atop two-inch high concrete screeds and captures water en route to a collection zone away from the house. Because the shower is in the middle of a furniture-filled room (instead of the customary tile- or concrete-walled space) Crowell had to work harder to waterproof. "I assumed that water would get past the metal walls," he says. His backup system includes peel-and-stick rubber sheets layered over walls sheathed in marine-grade plywood. He primed the pine ceilings on all four sides with oil-based paint as protection from the elements.



GROUND-FLOOR PLAN  
(Unshaded area is the remodeled portion of the house.)



The architect proposed extrapolating the array of diverse spaces from the dilapidated attached garage, and he almost succeeded. “The garage had defaulted into a storage space,” explains Lawrence, “and the deck above it was pelted by the sun, so it was too hot to use most of the time.” Besides, the approach to the garage had long ago been engulfed by the garden, which was not visible from anywhere inside the house.

Oddly too, the rectangular house seemed focused inward, providing little opportunity to gaze at the scenery that is David and Peese’s stock-in-trade. When their friend, interior designer John Saladino, came to Thanksgiving dinner five years ago, he stated the obvious: “You need to open up the house.”

“The new bedroom was meant to be a sanctuary for sleeping, bathing and looking out the window,” says Lawrence. But with a walk-in closet taking up more than half the space, there was just enough room left for a hallway and the narrowest of rooms (seven and a half feet wide), says Lawrence. Ignoring the two-car limitations of the garage footprint, the architect extended the room into the garden a couple of feet and opened up the wall with a grid of windows. His solution pleased David: “I worked hard on the garden, but there was no place in the house I could see it.”

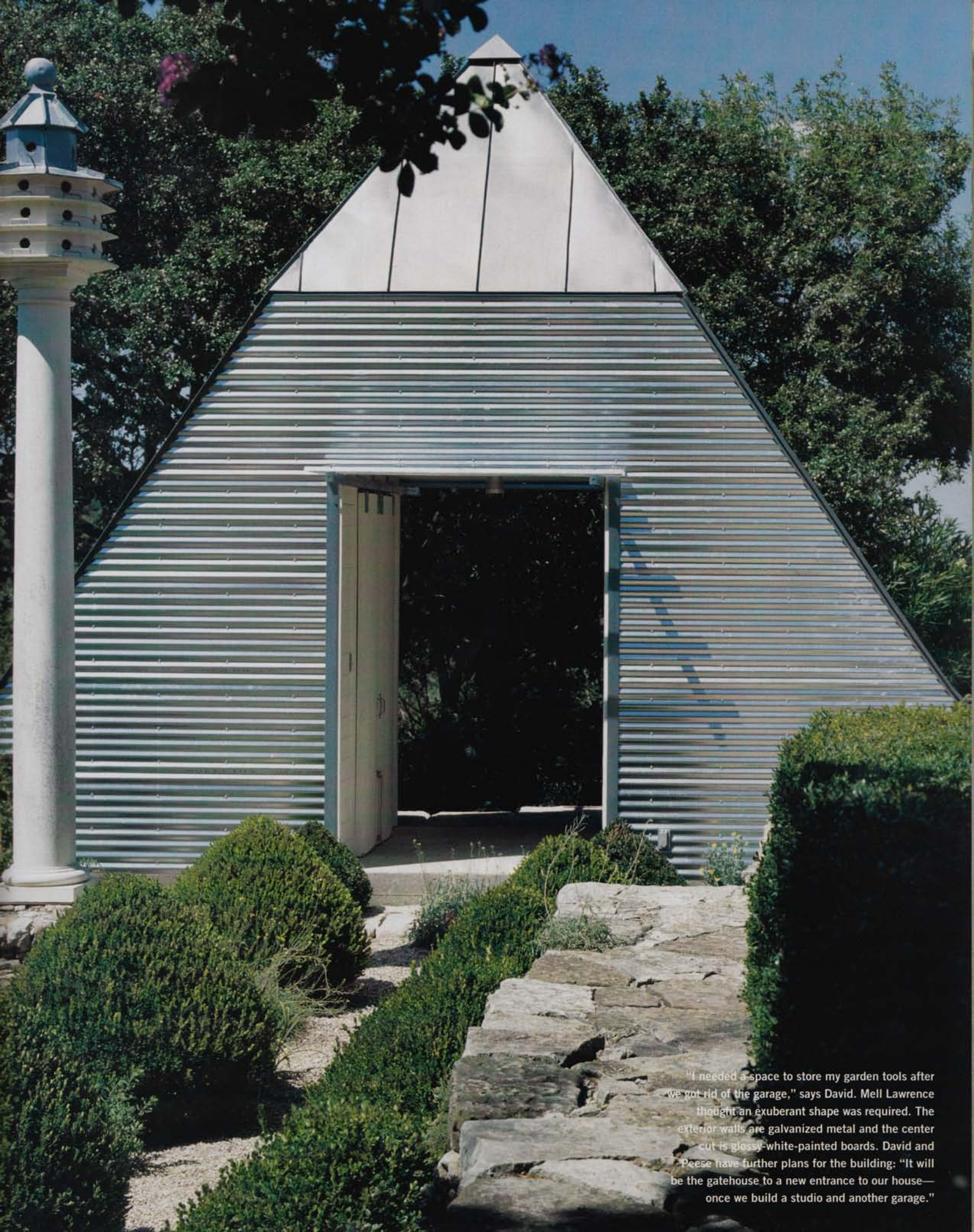
Even though the ceiling scarcely topped eight feet, Lawrence was confident that the protracted space wouldn’t seem confined. “The windows were such a huge continuous opening,” Lawrence explains, “that I never worried about the proportions of the room.” Horizontal wood-plank walls at one end and on

the ceiling were crazed with irregularities, but David insisted on a high-gloss-paint treatment the color of mist. “It made me nervous because the gloss makes every blemish show,” Lawrence says, “but the effect is perfect. It accentuates the wood texture and animates the light.”

Obviously, neither clients nor architect were following the rules, so no one was concerned that a built-in concrete desk skirting the entire length of the windows would aggravate appearances further. “It’s a skinny room,” says David, “and I decided we shouldn’t try to disguise it.” Furniture selection was pursued accordingly. A 19th-century French mirror, luxe leather pillows and a hefty Japanese merchant’s chest make no concessions to the room’s lack of breadth. The bed—one end tucked cozily underneath the desk—serves by day as a chaise.

Capturing selected views turned out to be the dominant motif in the renovation, nowhere more evident than in the elevation of the previous deck to the status of an outdoor room. The standing-seam metal roof—a soaring armature of bolted steel trusses—shades the porch in a protective embrace. Low eaves focus side views onto the gardens below and block out new suburban development. Peaking dramatically, the roof frames the spectacle David and Peese want to see—Austin’s skyline and the garden that David had so presciently planted years before. **mh**  
*See Resources, last pages.*

*Helen Thompson’s latest book is Cooking Spaces: Designs for Cooking, Entertaining and Living (Rockport Publishers).*



"I needed a space to store my garden tools after we got rid of the garage," says David. Mell Lawrence thought an exuberant shape was required. The exterior walls are galvanized metal and the center cut is glossy-white-painted boards. David and Peese have further plans for the building: "It will be the gatehouse to a new entrance to our house—once we build a studio and another garage."