



# Small and Skinny



BEST SMALL HOME



Challenging market norms with a thoughtful modern design

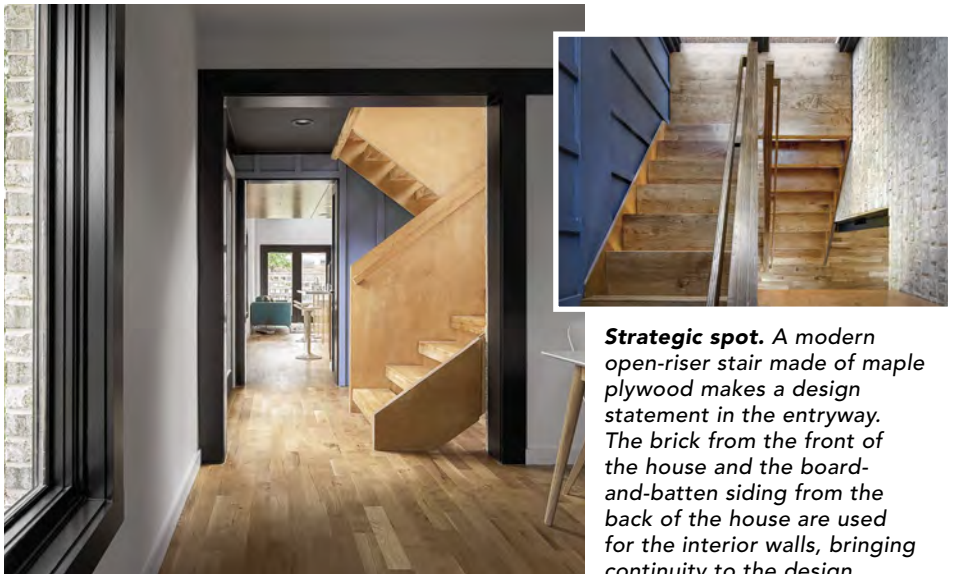
BY BRIAN PONTOLILO

**W**hen Alex Wu started his own architecture firm in 2016, he decided to make his first project a spec home.

Finding a decent lot in the Atlanta area proved challenging, and many of the more ideal building lots wouldn't be right for what Alex had in mind. He was planning to build a well-designed home that would be smart, small, stylish, and affordable. Alex's project would be an outlier in a market where the norm for spec homes is to put as many square feet as possible on each lot by building a big box of a house outfitted with all the latest popular finishes, to be sold at a premium.

The lot Alex ended up building on is a mere 20 ft. wide with an immovable utility pole planted on the street front. The local zoning setbacks would have allowed only a 6-ft.-wide home to be built on the property, so Alex's first order of business was to apply for a variance. He got it, and the approved plans allowed him to build a 14-ft.-wide house—still an awfully skinny structure—by reducing the side-yard setback from 7 ft. to 3 ft., and reducing the front-yard setback from 30 ft. to 10 ft. Still, Alex had to build a three-story house to get the minimal space he needed to make the home marketable to buyers—but it's the customized details that make it uniquely attractive. □

Brian Pontolilo is a former *Fine Homebuilding* editor. Photos by Garey Gomez.



**Strategic spot.** A modern open-riser stair made of maple plywood makes a design statement in the entryway. The brick from the front of the house and the board-and-batten siding from the back of the house are used for the interior walls, bringing continuity to the design.



## SPECS

**Bedrooms:** 2, plus home office

**Bathrooms:** 2½

**Size:** 1650 sq. ft.

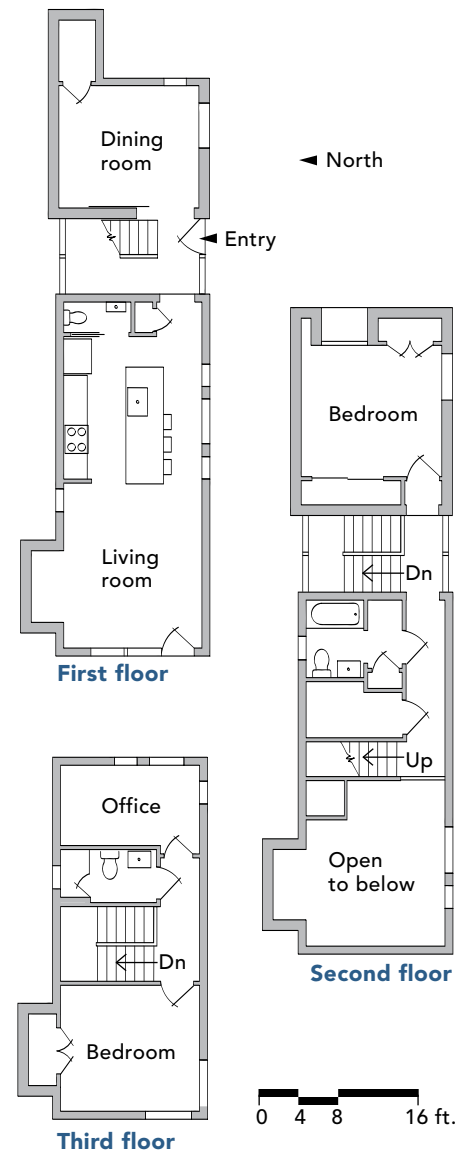
**Location:** Atlanta, Ga.

**Architect:** Alex Wu Architect,  
awu-arch.com

**Builder:** F.M. Studio,  
fmstudiollc.com

## DESIGN INGENUITY

Alex's aim was to show that spec houses and investment properties can be designed and built with custom details. In celebration of the architecturally diverse Atlanta neighborhood, he designed a modern brick cube at the front and a more traditional three-story gable form at the back, separated by entry doors. The vaulted family room is surprising in such tight quarters—most spec builders looking to maximize square footage and profit would have made the space above the living room into a bedroom.



### ONLINE EXCLUSIVES

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