



e Americans don't have an architectural heritage like the Europeans," said architect Kevin Pfirman,

who was conducting a walk around his Wrightsville Avenue property for his Shell Road Village neighbors, who wondered why the house under construction looked the way it did and who was going to live there.

Adjacent to the new home are two refurbished structures; one a home for his family, the other, his studio. When built out, the cluster of live/work dwellings will likely brand the Pfirman aesthetic.

A native of Northfield, New Jersey, he earned his architecture degree from the University of North Carolina Charlotte and soon after joined a prestigious local design firm. Taking his cues from a handful of area architects, Pfirman characterized their influence this way: one is known for site development; another for formal invention; one he calls a structural naturalist; another a one-man show who knows how to navigate the public works process and still pull off some architecture. Pfirman admits he aspires to some if not all of these admirable traits.

"Architecture isn't as creative as you think it is," he said. "After you make all the big decisions, it's little bits of creativity along the way."

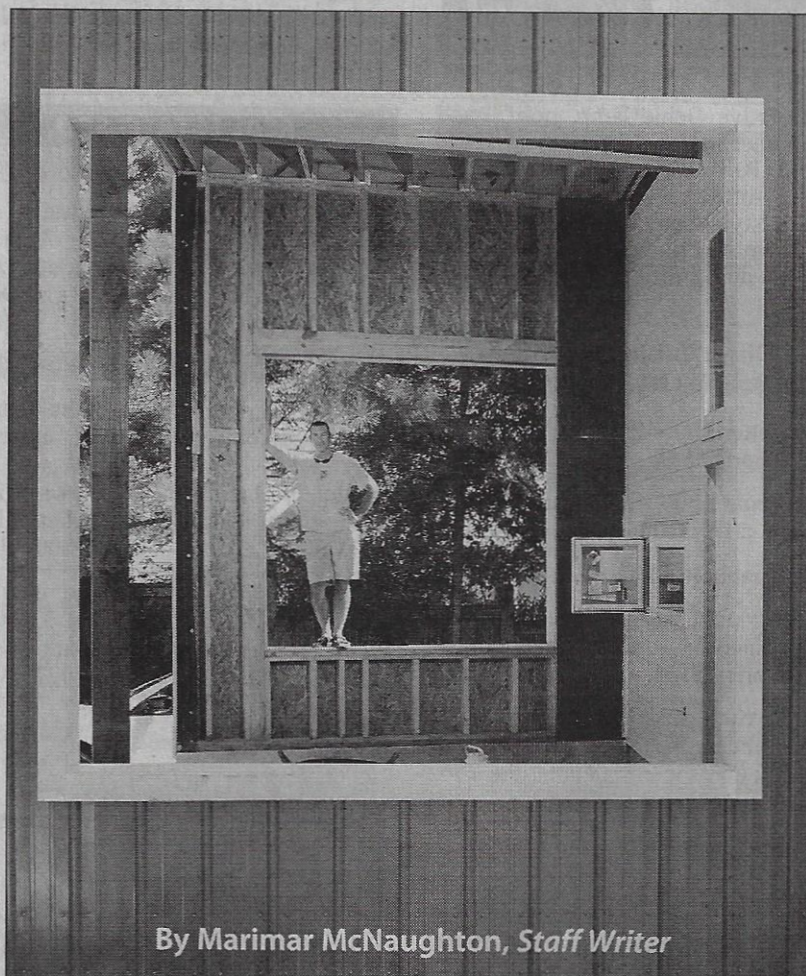
The big decisions he made when developing the Wrightsville Avenue property involved the massing of two more homes on tiny urban lots. He began by designing on paper three unique design solutions to determine which problem to give hierarchy.

On Wrightsville Avenue, near the intersection of Greenville Road, the external obsolescence of a busy roadway at certain times of day tops the list.

Add the unfavorable topography of a site that slopes toward the road, plus a lot that when drawn on plan resembles a trapezoid. And even with the best passive solar orientation aimed at a southeastern exposure, buffered by trees, the solitude of the living area would still be impacted by the sound of passing vehicles.

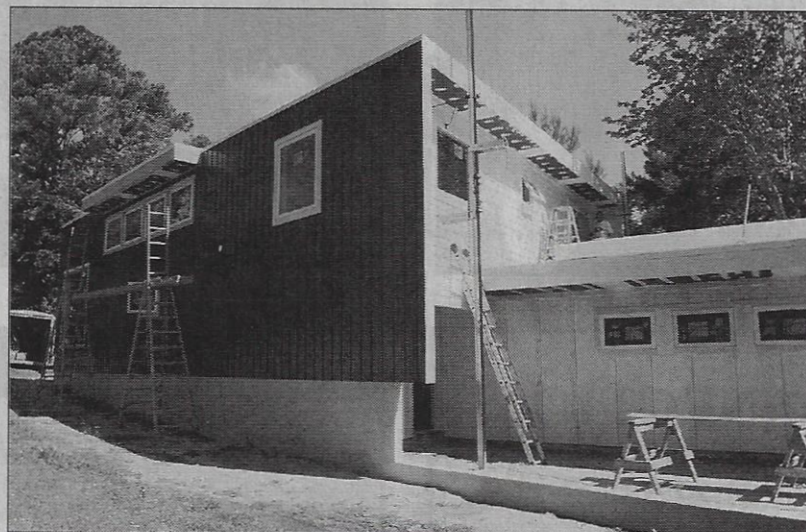
"Wrightsville Avenue is predisposed to a front porch aesthetic. That was okay when Model T's cruised down the shell road," Pfirman said, grinning. Clearly he relishes the mix of odds and the challenge of finding the solution.

For a 1,400 square foot home that he designed for Tanner Konrady, that Konrady is constructing with his dad — veteran Wrightsville Beach builder, Ralph Konrady — Pfirman began with the placement of an attached garage on the east elevation by the roadside. The entry brings the homeowners into a small foyer. Rising a few steps toward the western elevation is one large living area under 14-foot ceilings that opens to a towering screened porch designed to support the flow of air from one end of the



By Marimar McNaughton, Staff Writer

Industrial maritime architecture *finds a home in* Wrightsville



Staff photos by Allison Breiner

Above: A split level design by architect Kevin Pfirman is under construction on Wrightsville Avenue. Top: Architect Kevin Pfirman stands on the back porch of a home he designed for Tanner Konrady on Wrightsville Avenue.

house through the central living area to the upper bedroom loft.

The main space is one-room wide, a Pfirman trademark that he calls the dog trot.

The concrete slab floor functions like a thermal buffer, a living, breathing organism that when cooled to 76 degrees keeps the house chilled in the summer months and warmed in winter.

The fenestration, or arrangement of windows, is for light, ventilation, view while seated or for the completion of a task from a standing position.

In the case of the Konrady project, keeping cost to a minimum was a factor, and the choice of creative materials was an additional consideration.

As the house has taken shape since it broke ground last winter, modifications have been made to the program based on the surrounding natural elements, like the angle of the southwestern sun, or lifestyle choices that directed final outcomes at the bedroom level, one-half story above the living area.

The selection of a battleship gray aluminum board and batten siding for the envelope with lapstrake weatherboard across the back porch creates a context for the new home anchored in an industrial maritime aesthetic.

In his studio, where the interior walls are covered in his architectural renderings that date back to his masters thesis for a coast guard station and maritime museum in a marsh setting, bookshelves line the lower wall. On the countertop, an exhibit of scale models, some embellished with found objects — a red tail hawk feather, a small mammal skull — include an unbuilt villa for a prominent business man and local philanthropist; the third design of a soundfront home for a wealthy dot com capitalist; two neighboring homes on a quiet creekside near Greenville Sound, a design for a waterfront home in Currituck County and a pile of renderings for five home designs ranging from less than 700 to 1,300 square feet for a Holden Beach project.

Achieving massing through combinations of small structures linked together, applied with atypical finish materials, corrugated steel for one, paint colors for another, the split level, split once, twice, three and four times; the one-room dog trot intersection modified with cat walks; the reinvention of inside balconies and outdoor showers; the breezeway as blow through, the rooftop patio, the rooftop garden are all parts of the Pfirman idiom.

After 11 years of practice in Wilmington, his style, though not for everybody, is slowly trickling into the mainstream. With one trapezoidal lot left at the Wrightsville Avenue address, he has already completed the preliminary design that will be the last piece of the puzzle. He has clients waiting to claim the commission: Europeans, of course.