

MANSION



Arc of A City

Continued from page M1
in 1986 from Monroe, La., to the University of Texas at Austin for graduate school. They were checking out a small, rundown duplex when Mr. Sharplin glanced up the steep, weed-covered hill and saw a woman outside another small, rundown house. “What’s that house?” Mr. Sharplin asked the broker. He hiked up and approached the woman, Joan Huntley, who is 81. It turned out she was the owner of both homes, which had been in her family for over

50 years. “He kissed me on the cheek,” says Ms. Huntley. “It was very endearing.” A series of conversations ensued, with multiple gatherings over tea on the upper home’s front porch. At first, Ms. Huntley, who grew up on the property, said she wasn’t interested in selling. Then she proposed that the Sharplins buy both homes to create a large, co-housing retirement community. When the Sharplins said no, she suggested they renovate the upper house and allow her to live there with them. After five months, when every one of Ms. Huntley’s concepts had been exhausted, the Sharplins convinced Ms. Huntley and her sister to



Architectural fees: \$183,000

sell both properties to them for \$2.3 million, which they did in March 2016. Ms. Huntley lived in the house for another eight months. Since the Sharplins needed to put a dollar amount on her lease, they charged her \$1, which Ms. Huntley paid with a silver dollar (“for grins,” says Ms. Sharplin). Meanwhile, they gathered their architect and contractor and began the design process. When Ms. Huntley failed to clean out

Dan and Sylvia Sharplin, top left. Their new living and dining space has 14-foot-high glass windows that overlook downtown Austin. Mr. Sharplin’s office, bottom.

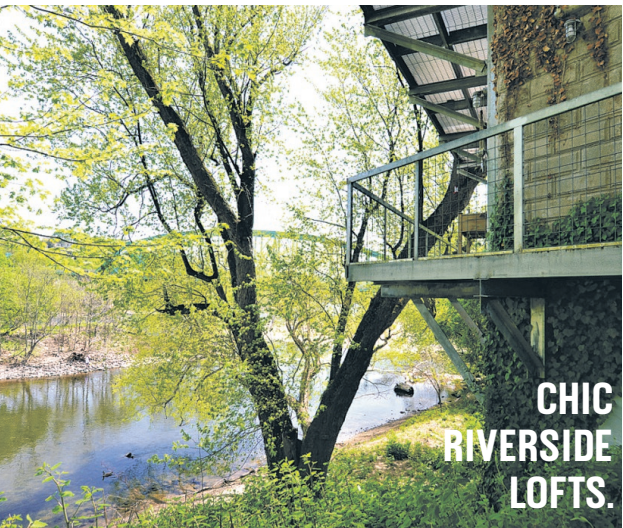


The traditional entranceway

all the “collections,” mostly magazines and books that had accumulated in the home, the Sharplins took care of that. They threw away some, donated some and kept some, including selected Life Magazine covers, which they framed and hung by the stairway. “At that point, we’d become friends,” says Ms. Sharplin. Ms. Huntley concurs. “We bonded,” she says. Then the real work began. They knew they would just tear down the lower, two-story house, since it was in such bad shape and not old enough to be considered historic. But it turned out that the upper house, built in 1915, was also in bad shape—worse than they had initially thought, with pipes failing and a hole in the roof. “It was falling apart, a crumbling bungalow on a crumbling hill,” says James LaRue of LaRue Architects. “I thought you just couldn’t



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