

# Rethinking Spaces in the Home

BY GEORGE MCCLURE  
AND GAVIN HAVERSTICK



PHOTOS COURTESY OF MARY CAROLINE RUSSELL.



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GAVIN HAVERSTICK  
HAVERSTICK DESIGNS



**AT TECHNOLOGY DESIGNER MAGAZINE** the focus is often on new construction, but we know that renovation is also an important source of revenue for architects, designers and contractors. This seems especially important now, as, for a variety of reasons, more and more folks are re-evaluating the utility of their homes. Some have become empty-nesters and are looking to repurpose their kids’ bedrooms. Others, having lived in their houses for a while, realize that certain areas are underutilized and would make more sense with a different configuration. And now, with the shelter-in-place measures prevalent during the COVID-19 pandemic, lots of people need more robust home office space — and many plan to continue working from home at least part of the time even after things get back to a semblance of normalcy.

Moving forward then, we will be periodically showcasing visionary new projects that allow homes to go above and beyond their traditional functions. Our first story is about an interesting and unusual job in Atlanta.

## *Casa Blanco home recording studio*

For the past few decades, David Crowder has been a powerful force in the world of contemporary Christian music. As the lead vocalist of the David Crowder Band until the group disbanded in 2012, and as a solo artist known simply as Crowder, he has won multiple Dove Awards from the Gospel Music Association as well as a nomination for a Grammy in 2005 for the band’s album *A Collision*. He has won multiple GMA awards from the Gospel Music Association and is a four-time Grammy Nominee.

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He and his wife Toni bought their current Atlanta residence in 2014. “One of the reasons for our purchasing this home,” says David, “was that there was enough unfinished basement space for Toni’s design business to operate out of and for me to have a studio. We had previous experience with a studio installation in a house we refurbished when we lived in Texas. It was quite old, built in 1886, and had a barn behind it that we converted into studio space, so my typical creative workflow included being able to produce music at home when not on the road. I travel extensively — or at least used to — and was quite eager to have such a convenient place to work.”

The couple did a major renovation of the home shortly after buying it, and then lived there for a while before embarking on the studio project. “When we purchased the house we weren’t looking for a big project,” says Toni, “but it was in such a great location and was priced knowing it needed a major remodel, so we couldn’t say no. The potential for studio space for David and tons of work space for me were an added bonus.”

## *in the beginning*

The Crowders began the process of creating the studio in mid-2019. Says David, “A friend of mine suggested talking to Jacob ‘Biz’ Morris [head engineer at Reach Records]. I knew Biz and gave him a holler. He connected us with Haverstick Designs, and Gavin came and measured the space acoustically so we’d be able to consider all the potential room configurations available to us. We had a lot of conversations about my creative process and how important and efficient it was for me to have everything that was in my vicinity ready to make noise and be available to capture as soon as I picked it up.

“Both Biz and Gavin have unique insight into the creative process, so much of the front-end conversations centered around workflow, how it is I go about making what I make and what things impede or aid that process. For me it was like therapy because I couldn’t answer that question or admit to even *having* a process, which led to the revelation that I don’t have *go to’s* necessarily — I prefer to have *discoveries*, new experiences that take me on a journey to an end product.”

“I’ve done a lot of work with Biz Morris,” Gavin Haverstick explains. “This project came up and he was involved on the gear integration side of things, so he brought me onboard for the acoustics. We came in and conducted acoustical testing when the room was empty, before any acoustical treatment was added. We built acoustical models and figured out the existing problems and were able to really drill down on what the proper solutions would be in terms of acoustical treatment. Then, in conjunction with Toni and David, we designed an acoustical treatment plan that married the acoustical performance we desired with the aesthetics. We didn’t want to sacrifice acoustical performance for aesthetics — or vice versa.”

## *sound and vision*

Toni’s firm, TONIC Design Co., did the interior design, and for her, the aesthetics were considered as important as the acoustics right from the get-go. “The rest of the home is contemporary and white and I wanted this to be an extension of that,” says Toni. “I think it’s an easy trap to be all *vibe* — good for creating and writing but not the best recording environment — or 100 percent on *sound*, but not very inspiring or flexible. We obviously wanted both.”

The 400-square-foot control room features a stretch-fabric system by Simplified Acoustics, who handled the installation of all of the interior acoustical treatments and lighting. Custom perforated acoustical panels backlit with color-changing LEDs help set the mood in the studio, along with a unique rear-wall bass trap that utilizes modern artwork covered with a clear quadratic residue diffuser. The lights are all on individual channels and the user can choose one color everywhere or a variety throughout the room — for instance, certain areas can be green while others are blue. Several pre-determined vignette presets are built-in, and everything is controllable via a smart phone app.

Additional design and curation services were provided by Toni’s firm, including a custom mix desk and acoustical panels built by buildhouse (an Atlanta-based custom furniture maker) and synth wall unit built by Adam Hart. Biz Morris coordinated all aspects of the studio design and gear selection and procurement through IsRael Foster at Sweetwater. For you gearheads out there, the studio is equipped with Focal





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DAVID CROWDER IN HIS STUDIO.



Trio11 Be speakers, a Toft ATB 24-channel mixer, Tascam ML-16D/ML-32D I/O Dante interfaces and 8P Dyna mic preamps, Universal Audio Apollo x16 interface, and more.

“Getting the technology right was important to me,” says Toni, “so I really needed to trust the pros. Gavin and Biz were great at getting me the answers I needed to do my part. As a designer, one of my pet peeves is when you aren’t given all of the specifics and you’re left trying to ‘hide’ a driver or pump or something. I use AutoCAD and Sketchup, which made it easy to share and design around what Gavin was requiring in the acoustical treatments. This is the third studio I’ve worked on, so I was prepared for the idea that this whole room was going to shrink once all of the sound absorption and diffusion was added. I would ask about particular materials, angles, and reflective surfaces to make sure I was not creating any issues for them.”

## *other considerations*

For Gavin, one of the interesting angles on this job was that no sound mitigation was required. “The studio is in the base-

ment,” he says, “and David and Toni told me if sound leaked out of the room it wasn’t going to impact anybody else in the house. Instead of spending any money on isolation and blocking the sound, they wanted it all to go towards making the room sound as good as possible — and obviously on some of the aesthetic details that go along with that.”

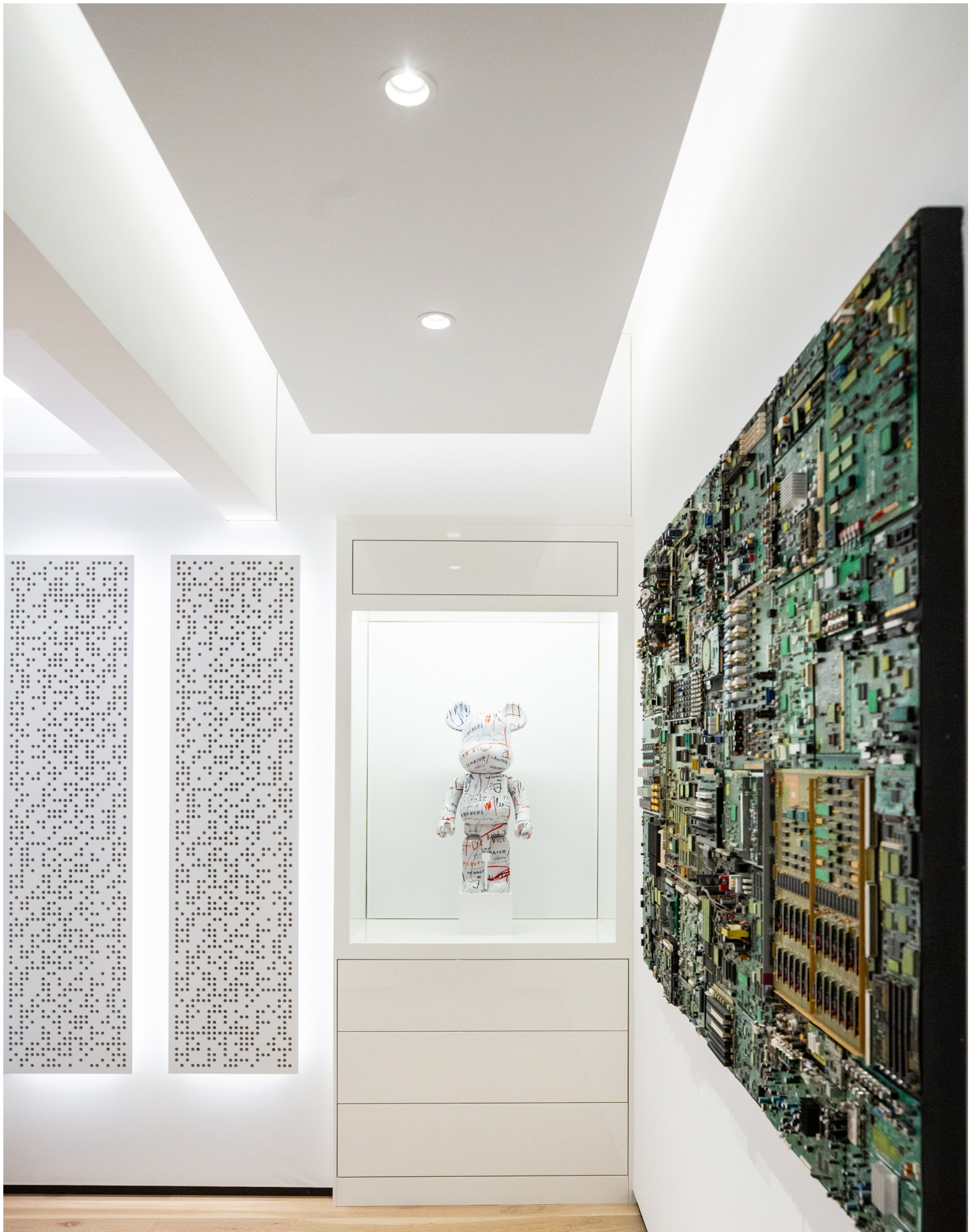
The vestibule/entryway of the home has 20-foot ceilings with a chamber, or hall-like, reverb time — a completely different sound color than in the studio below. When renovating the rest of the house, the Crowders ran audio wiring through the walls from the studio up to this space for the ability to record drums, an orchestra or nearly anything else.

“David really wanted a lot going on,” says Biz, “which was awesome. He has a synth station on the other side of the room. He has a DJ station with turntables. And then, he wanted to be able to track drums upstairs and have guitars live in a place where they wouldn’t bleed, so that’s on the other side of the house. All that had to be wired in and hooked up, and we had to really think outside the box on how to make this happen.”

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Toni's experience informed much of the design. "Spending a lot of time in studios has made me aware that sometimes people need to be near the action so they can come record a quick part, but it is not helpful for them to be *in the actual* studio the whole time. This led me to place the home theater immediately adjacent to the studio, creating and encouraging a 'hang out' space (complete with Xbox, PlayStation, etc.). The studio can also send audio of what they are working on to the theater sound system or pool or wherever you want in the house using Control4 automation."

## revelations

The studio was just finished this summer, and everyone involved has been ecstatic with the results. Says Biz, "My favorite part of working on that studio was watching Toni and David's reaction to what we were doing, the Wow! factor. I mean, just working with them and coordinating and bringing their ideas to life, was all phenomenal."

"The room turned out great," adds Gavin. "I just went down to Atlanta recently to do the final testing and tweaks, where we adjusted the positioning of speakers and changed some settings on the subwoofers. David was already pretty happy before, but after the adjustments, he came in and said, 'You've got to be kidding me! Now, it's all up to me.'"

Toni happily says, "I love that David wants to be in there. It sounds unbelievable and is so efficient, and easily makes available to him all the tools he might need in an instant. Recording and writing can be like catching lightning in a bottle, and it feels like there are a lot of ready bottles about."

Finally, from the person who's opinion matters the most: "It's really freeing to have all of the tools at the ready at all times and be able just to walk in, pop in my laptop, and immediately have whatever I've been working on right there in front of me, with the room ready to use. I've never worked in a better-sounding space."



### DESIGN AND CURATION SERVICES

**TONIC Design Co.** | [tonicdesignco.com](http://tonicdesignco.com)

### EQUIPMENT PROCUREMENT AND INSTALLATION

**Jacob "Biz" Morris** | [jacobbiz.co](http://jacobbiz.co)

### ACOUSTICAL DESIGN

**Haverstick Designs** | [haverstickdesigns.com](http://haverstickdesigns.com)

### CUSTOM FURNITURE SOLUTIONS

**buildhouse** | [thebuildhouse.com](http://thebuildhouse.com)

### EQUIPMENT PROVIDED

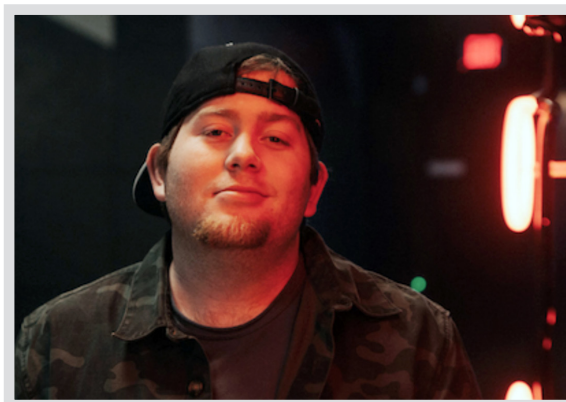
**Sweetwater** | [sweetwater.com](http://sweetwater.com)

### STRETCH FABRIC SYSTEM

**Simplified Acoustics** | [simplifiedacoustics.com](http://simplifiedacoustics.com)

### SYNTHESIZER WALL

**Adam Hart** | [custommade.com/by/hartcustoms](http://custommade.com/by/hartcustoms)



**JACOB 'BIZ' MORRIS**

HEAD ENGINEER AT REACH RECORDS.