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# NOT WITHOUT MY MUSE

In Lexington's modernist neighborhood of Six Moon Hill, a studio meant for creativity and contemplation takes advantage of the great outdoors.

**BY MARNI ELYSE KATZ**  
PHOTOGRAPHS BY NAT REA





**Facing page:** The studio is a flex space for dance practice, birthday parties, sleepovers, reading, movie nights, and contemplating nature.

**This page:** Outside, the sunken, stainless steel hot tub has a ce-

ment block foundation, wood decking, and copper trim. The site plan follows the property's slope with the screened carport—which glows like a lantern at night—at street level and stairs that lead down to the studio.

**A**s Flavin Architects developed a plan for a stand-alone creative space and backyard spa for Alexandra Elliott and her family, Elliott recalled a story she learned as a student in China. It's the tale behind a regional soup dish known as crossing-the-bridge noodles, wherein a scholar's wife carries soup for her husband across a bridge to an island, where he sought a quiet, separate place to study. At her home, Elliott says, "The studio seemed like a parallel space, not exclusively for scholarship, but as a garden retreat designed for dance, art, reading, study, and friendship."

The 640-square-foot studio and outdoor stainless steel hot tub, along with the carport that Colin Flavin and Heather Souza designed, align with the Bauhaus aesthetic of the modernist Six Moon Hill neighborhood in Lexington. "It was a wonderful challenge to take the modest materials characteristic of these 1940s structures—concrete blocks and vertical cedar siding—and do something sculptural with them," Flavin says.

The architects collaborated with landscape designer Jonathan Keep on a plan that flows down the sloped property. The slatted carport sits at street level and monolithic boulders mark the top of stone stairs, which travel alongside the carport's cinder block base down to the studio. Another set of steps branches off, winding gently through lush greenery to the grass between the new studio and the existing home. The 5-foot-by-5-foot hot tub is stepped down farther still, tucked into a tangle of trees. "The path descends from the street and becomes quieter as you look over the sunken hot tub to the forest beyond," Flavin says.

The landscape is as important as the buildings. For one, the garden invites visitors outdoors. "The client wanted to draw the family out," Souza says. "We angled the studio to offer a visual connection between it and the house, so it beckons one to use it."

The views from the studio, too, are carefully considered. As a flex space for dance practice, birthday parties, and sleepovers, the studio interior is airy and spare. As a respite for quiet contemplation, there are framed views to nature. "The end of the building is a big wall of glass with wing walls on both sides that help keep the focus on the woodland setting," Flavin says. Finally, there is the experience of soaking in the hot tub. "You see every aspect of the seasons—the snowstorms, the flowers. It is truly an oasis," Elliott says. ■

## Resources

### ARCHITECT:

Flavin Architects,  
[flavinarchitects.com](http://flavinarchitects.com)

### LANDSCAPE

**DESIGN:** Jonathan Keep Landscape Design, [jonathankeep.com](http://jonathankeep.com)

### CONTRACTOR:

P.M. Gallagher Builders,  
[pmgallagher.com](http://pmgallagher.com)

### LANDSCAPE

**CONTRACTOR:** Cleiton Landscape and Masonry,  
[cleitonmasonry.com](http://cleitonmasonry.com)

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