

# The Corner Store:

## Gallery, Performance Space, Artists' Home and Showroom

ARTICLE AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY DEREK THOMAS

This space occupied by the Corner Store at 900 South Carolina Ave. SE embodies everything that makes Capitol Hill great and flavored. The building dates to 1870 and was a family-owned and operated store until 1968 when a murder caused the family to board it up and move away. The store remained that way for years and was an eyesore. The space is a great corner location that has wraparound grounds and even an enclave to the rear that connects the house to the garage. In 2001 Kris Swanson fell for the space, and the birth of the Corner Store followed in short order.

### The Artist

Kris Swanson is a lifelong artist who has been immersed in the art world from her birth; both of her parents are artists, so her movement into the world of art was a given. She considers herself to be art-centric with a very organic position in relation to all that surrounds her and strived to move her love for all that is organic to the space of her latest home, studio, gallery and art space – the Corner Store. She was raised in the Southwest and has spent many enjoyable days in the Tuscany region of Italy, so it is no accident that the space has a Euro-western flair.

### The Spaces

The gardens are the reason that I was compelled to ring the doorbell and ask Kris to share with Hill Rag readers the unique space outside of her home. However, for me to do that, I must share

the vibrant energy that exists throughout the space – an energy that is warm, inviting and functionally eclectic.

The Corner Store is a home that Kris freely shares with Capitol Hill; she lives upstairs with her husband, but her home is a gift to the community. The colors throughout the garden and art space are rich and vibrant. The vast spaces, both inside and out, are inviting. There is a great sense of belonging and comfort from the grand front hall that is dedicated to art shows and performances, to the revolving gallery that is her rear Euro-western inspired patio.

Every room inside is colored in vibrant life-celebrating colors, and the gardens are one of the most wondrous spaces on Capitol Hill. Kris designed and installed all the garden rooms and has painstakingly given untold hours to create an artist's retreat in a very public space. The front is historically accurate with brick walks and two urn planters that flank the front doors. The side garden is enclosed by a traditional iron fence, and there are grand grassy areas with flowering trees and shrubs throughout. This is where the predictable Capitol Hill garden ends.

The southwest corner of the side garden contains the most original water feature that can be found on Capitol Hill. Kris says that when she was working with the laborers to install her walkways and rear patio, the large stones were resting on the side of her home, and she wanted to show off their beauty. Her neighbor had experience with fountain installation, so she learned from him how to cre-

CLOCKWISE: The Corner Store; The garden path flows like water from the fountain; Inside the garden gallery; The garden and pathways



ate a custom water feature. From there she envisioned a flowing stream, which she created with recycled glass. Stunning. She made a triple glass and steel birdbath that is the perfect accent to an artist's fountain.

The garden then continues to flow from its watery beginnings to the side gardens that are grassy with lush plantings of evergreens and overflowing flowerbeds. The rear garden is hidden behind a wooden fence and under a rose arbor where the flagstone path winds away from the main gardens to a wondrous secret rear garden gallery. Stepping through the rose arbor is like leaving Washington and gliding to a wondrous Tuscan garden retreat. The flagstone path opens and spills to the four corners of the patio. The color throughout the space has been juxtaposed in the art, the furnishings and the ambiance.

There are mosaics, bronze and slumped glass art pieces that are all from the artist and were designed to be a part of what she calls her revolving art space. The stucco walls and wooden fencing collide with plants like blueberry and hibiscus to envelope you into this artist's retreat. There is an overwhelming sense of solace while sitting in the patio gallery. The bustle of whatever has your world spinning evaporates as Kris invites you to stay for the evening's show. And to think she was worried about what the neighbors would say. I think it is safe to say that Capitol Hill says thank you, Kris, for adding yet another essential element to what has made our neighborhood fare in the top 10 neighborhoods in the US.

For more information on the Corner Store, visit [www.krisswanson.net](http://www.krisswanson.net).

*Derek Thomas, a certified professional horticulturist, is principal landscape designer of Thomas Landscapes and Maintenance. His garden designs have appeared on HGTV's Curb Appeal. He can be contacted at [www.thomaslandscapes.com](http://www.thomaslandscapes.com) or 301-642-5182. ■*

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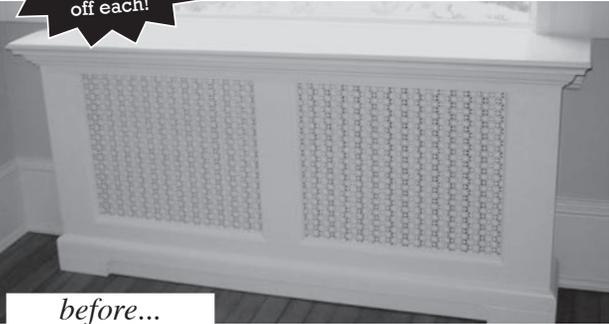





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