

The Real Danger of Atlanta's Diet Clinics

Atlanta



Mack Scogin and Merrill Elam

Who Says You Can't Have a Lap Pool in Your Bedroom?

Two Famous Architects Break
All the Rules in Their Startling
Bedroom

ROBERT PRECHTER
SAYS YOUR 401-K IS DOOMED

PEABO BRYSON
CHANGING HIS WORLD?

Who Says You Can't Have a Lap Pool in Your Bedroom?

Award-winning architects Mack Scogin and Merrill Elam certainly don't. Their house has a column floating above the floor, a kitchen without cabinets and a library on a steel bridge.

By Emma Edmunds

Photography by Tim Hursley

When Hurricane Opal sent a giant tree crashing through the roof of the



Architects Mack Scogin and his wife, Merrill Elam, designed the 50-by-5-foot lap pool to run straight across the front of the second story of their Brookwood Hills home. The configuration of space is so unusual, but so peaceful, so close to nature and the neighborhood, so blessed with ever-changing light and ever-shifting reflections, that it completely defies one's notions of what is inside, what is outside.

Even though there is a lap pool upstairs that weighs 48.8 tons (the gray concrete structure, this page), the feature doesn't dominate the lower floor; one of the architects' many accomplishments was to create a sense of exceptional lightness in the downstairs space. The steel beam is an important detail, included not for structural reasons, but to provide the proper contrast between horizontal and vertical.

In its openness, the exterior of Scogin and Elam's home, right, is in the tradition of their Brookwood Hills neighborhood, a place where at night windows are open, blinds back, lights are on and people are walking on the sidewalk. The second-story pool, running across the front of the house, is on an outside "porch," shielded from the street by translucent glass, illuminated at night when the pool lights are on.

Below right, stairs leading to the room where Scogin and Elam now sleep, though that may change, as there is no designation to any room.

Brookwood Hills home of Mack Scogin and his wife, Merrill Elam, the architects expected reactions from the neighbors. Maybe sympathy? Words of encouragement? Not a chance. Past experience had taught the couple that in Atlanta their designs — even a little crumpled house with a tree through its roof — generate strong and unexpected emotions.


Elam and Scogin may have considered the aftermath of Opal a grim day — she likened the house to a wrecked car that was "totaled" — but, as Scogin spins the story, "We had groups of neighbors outside the house after the tree fell applauding. They were so pleased to get rid of that thing.

And then the next day fear was in their eyes when they realized, 'Oh my God, they are not going to leave.' When they saw the blue tarp go up, they knew they were in trouble."

Allowing for a little exaggeration by Scogin, the Brookwood Hills residents had reason for concern. The street leading to Scogin and Elam's home in this lower Buckhead neighborhood is solidly traditional: two-story, brick or shingle Georgian houses, the windows with proper panes and sashes and frames, the lawns and pansy beds raked by yardmen as soon as a breeze stirs a leaf. Scogin and Elam are definitely not traditionalists.

They and partner Lloyd Bray have designed over a half-dozen award-winning buildings in Atlanta, not one of them familiar or expected: a Clayton County library of corrugated metal siding and inside, a chandelier made of a satellite dish fitted with metal stadium lights; a house lifted up on concrete





Furnishings are sparse, mostly designer chairs; eventually Scogin and Elam plan to design mobile or convertible furniture for the house. "The idea would be to have furniture that is totally abstracted," Scogin says.

One experiences Scogin and Elam's house as if inside a geometric sculpture, discovering new revelations, new vistas, new perspectives on what a house can be

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supporting walls so a stream runs underneath: a chapel with no soaring Gothic arches and no stained-glass windows and not even an old-fashioned steeple — instead a “spine” of steel bents, the tallest topped with a cross. If past experience were a measure, the neighbors were right to fear something extreme might happen.

It didn't take long — “oh, a minute or two,” Elam says — before the couple decided that to put the Monopoly box-house back as it was would be a major, major undertaking not worth the effort. Opal had presented them an opportunity to rethink their house in light of their architectural beliefs, lifestyles and personalities. Needless to say, when these two architects began to talk about a dream home, the discussion did not turn to anything as simple, ordinary or expected as an island for the kitchen or a cathedral ceiling for the family room.

She wanted a lap pool.

“She mentioned this lap pool, so that started the whole thing,” Scogin says. The memory triggers laughter in both of them. “And once she wanted a lap pool, where in the hell do you put a lap pool? And where do you put the rest of the house? And how do you get to the pool?”

The problem, specifically, was that the lot was small, only 60 by 120 feet, and the lap pool needed to be long, at least 50 feet long, or there was not much reason to do it. “Well there was this crazy idea of putting a lap pool that would cross three neighbors yards,” she says, shaking her head at the improbability of such a choice.

“You mentioned that. I dismissed it. I hoped that it would go away,” he says. The tone is more playful than critical. In Scogin's view it was not as if his wife were being unreasonable in asking for a lap pool. “She'd actually never asked for anything else, so we had to do the lap pool, right?” He glances at his wife with an expression that leaves no doubt he finds her unconventional-ity endearing. “She didn't even want a kitchen!”

She wanted sunlight. So, the first thought was *lap pool can't go inside the house*. Not in the back yard either, because they wanted privacy. There's a hill behind their house and other homes are perched with a view straight down into their domain. The front yard seemed fleetingly logical. A park lies directly across the street, providing a nice view. But the lap pool wouldn't be good on the ground-level front because that meant starting the house all over, from bottom to top.

So the lap pool ended up on the second floor. “It is completely logical,” Scogin says, as if putting an immensely heavy concrete structure on the second floor of a home is as sensible as a sauna or shower.

But the plan was destined to produce its share

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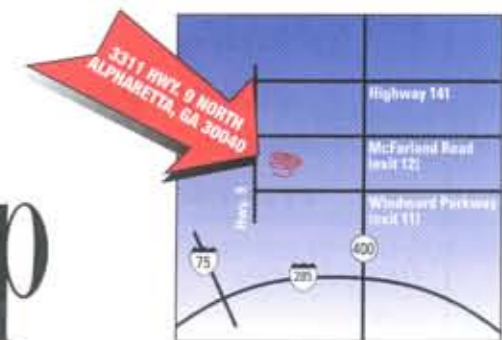
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Above, a steel bridge connects the main house to a guest house and studio out back.

of odd opinions, hardly a surprise, "because we get odd reactions all the time," Scogin says. "We got our ordinary reactions of astonishment, bewilderment . . ."

Elam chimes in, "disbelief."

"And *disbelief*," he repeats, as both of them chuckle.

They sometimes seem to savor the bewilderment they cause. Scogin recounts with theatrical flair the reaction of a worker viewing the house for the first time. "The men who moved the furniture in kept saying, 'This is a great house, a great house!' " he relates. "And I said, 'Well, come upstairs, I'll show you something.' They came up here. 'Whoa, whoa, what is this?' I said, 'That's going to be a swimming pool.' So he starts yelling to the others, 'Come here, come here, quick! Man says this is going to be a pool.' They kept saying 'Man, I'm coming back here for that pool.'"

The 50-by-5-foot pool runs straight across the front of the second story on an outside "porch," shielded from the street by translucent glass. Two stairways lead to the second floor, where the only enclosed space is a bathroom and their bedroom, created with glass on three sides.

The configuration of space is so unusual, but so peaceful, so close to nature and the neighborhood, so blessed with ever-changing light and ever-shifting reflections, that it completely defies one's notions of second-story quarters, to say nothing of one's concept of what is inside, what is outside. Sometimes, from a certain position and in a certain light it appears that the bed is floating in the pool. Or, from another perspective, that the pool is inside the bedroom. "In moonlight, it's remarkable," he says. "The streetlights, when you are in bed, illuminate [Continued on Page 142]

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album. According to Franklin, two major record labels are vying to sign Peabo for millions.

In many ways Peabo is where he started out: with talent, a desire to "reinvent" himself and self-confidence, but no record deal in hand.

He has simplified his life now. He calls himself a "born-again Christian." He talks of new ways of defining success: Dizzy Gillespie clapping his hand and refusing to let go until he shared how much he respects Peabo's music. Or, next to him on a plane, a 5-year-old girl singing Regina Belle's part in "A Whole New World," then waiting for Peabo to chime in. "That, to me, is success," he says.

He has traded his Rolls Royce for a black Range Rover. Though he has had several highly publicized love interests, including a heartbreaking relationship with the former Mrs. Sugar Ray Leonard, Juanita Nixon (now wife of former Braves' outfielder Otis Nixon), he is a single man. He is surrounded by family members, whom he relocated from Greenville, S.C., along with his mother. Though he still lives comfortably, gone are the days of heedless spending that accompanied his multimillion dollar deals.

"I have heart," proclaims Peabo. "I know I will emerge intact. I've done it before. Like black folk have always done, I have the creativity to reinvent myself."

Alternating between dragging on a cigarette and tossing Circus peanuts into his mouth, the singer plays for the reporter songs from his new album. These songs are "real music," songs he defines as having understandable lyrics and true human emotion.

First, there are newly arranged versions of two older songs: Leon Russell's "A Song for You" and Terence Trent D'Arby's "Sign Your Name." Then, two brand new love ballads: "Unconditional Love" and "I Promise I Do," both in the tradition of "Tonight, I Celebrate My Love" and "A Whole New World."

"The coolest thing in the world for me is creating from nothing," he says, puffing on what seems like an endless chain of tobacco. He coughs. "You take from this nothing, dig down from within yourself, and you make something."

Peabo is betting on his success. He says he beat the odds 20 years ago when disco knocked the love ballads off the charts. His songs survived. Now he believes he can do it again.

"There is nothing in my personality or in my history that suggests anyone should be standing over me counting to 10," says Peabo. "My music has gotten better. I'm here and I'm not going anywhere." ■

Jabari Simana is director of marketing and communications for the City of Atlanta.

LAP POOL

Continued from Page 76

the glass and it goes from gold to silver."

Though the bedroom and pool are very private, there is a decided connection to the neighborhood and outside world; ascending to the second floor, one arrives at the wooden decking of an area open to the sky. Sitting there in deck chairs in the dark, the couple can hear all the sounds of the night and the neighborhood, including folks walking by on the street; from that vantage, too, they see the expanse of park woods across the street.

If the pool lights are on, and the water is moving, passersby see reflections of snaking light moving across the front of the home. In its openness, at least, the house is in the tradition of the Brookwood Hills neighborhood that Scogin describes as friendly and upbeat, a place where at night windows are open, blinds back, lights are on, and people are out walking on sidewalks. "We did not wall ourselves off," he says.

But neighbors sometimes notice the innovation more than the tradition. "When you do a house like this, or any of our buildings, you get really good positive reaction and you get negative reaction," Scogin says. "For the most part, the neighbors — especially the neighbors to either side of us — have been incredibly patient, nice and excited."

One evening, in fact, the next door neighbors were having visitors for drinks. When Scogin came home, the entourage was coming up the driveway with cocktails and hors d'oeuvres in hand for the house tour. Yet, if some neighbors like the new addition, others are more guarded. "The way I know there are people who don't enjoy it so much is people who say, 'I love your house so much. I am one of your supporters.'" Elam says. "Then I know there are other people who don't."

SCOGIN AND ELAM BOUGHT THEIR Brookwood Hills home over 20 years ago when it was a simple, ordinary little box of basics — living room, dining room, two bedrooms, one bath, kitchen, porch — probably built, the couple speculates, as part of a Veterans Administration housing program.

A few years after the purchase the architects tore down the walls and removed most of the doors; they built a piano-shaped guest house and a triangular-shaped studio out back. And then they got busier and busier with projects all over the world. They were seldom home. When they were, the couple lived mostly in the dining room. Stuff piled up. Repairs accumulated. After a few years, the house "sorta went to seed," Scogin admits.

If there is a central idea to the new home, Scogin says, the concept can be traced to the days when they first created in the back the guest house and the studio. In this recent rebuilding the couple linked the guest house and the studio together and joined them both to the main structure with a steel and glass bridge (eventually to be a library), running from the second floor to the studio. Looking from the kitchen window, one is aware of all the diverse parts of the house.

The idea, like many of Scogin and Elam's, has historical roots: in this case, the concept goes back to outbuildings that have long been a fixture at old southern home places. Elam, who grew up in Nashville, remembers them from a farm property that her father bought as a second home; Scogin, who lived in Decatur and Avondale Estates, recalls outbuildings that were used as workrooms by his father, who made cornices, drapery and upholstery for decorators at Rich's.

Yet, the architects again push tradition to its limit in their own individual interpretation. They call their house the "healthy house," Elam says, because "the way the plan is, you can't use this house without walking up and down steps, across bridges, or going inside or outside all the time. Our idea — and actually the way we have been using it — is there is no designation to any room. Any room could be anything."

Currently, they sleep upstairs, but that could change. Originally, they had a bed in a downstairs room they call the "East Area" or the "East Situation."

It's a situation not everyone immediately grasps. And there are some situation exceptions. Like the kitchen. Every house has to have a kitchen. "But the kitchen doesn't look like a kitchen," Scogin says. "It doesn't have any cabinets."

Elam didn't want cabinets, at least none of those expansive, expensive ones, covering all the walls and growing out of the floor. "You remember that scene in *The Shining* where they open the doors of the kitchen cabinets, and it's like the kitchen cabinets are where all the monsters live — back there behind two layers of pots and pans," she says, "there are all sorts of critters, both real and imagined. I was down on dark spaces filled with forgotten things."

"Everybody is convinced you have to have cabinets," Scogin says, "then they invent ways to get things out of them. Turning wheels . . . sliding mechanisms . . . it's hilarious."

For a kitchen work area there is a steel "counter" suspended from the ceiling, extending to a large steel sink. For storage Elam uses a pantry and a kitchen wall outfitted with shelves and drawers. The pantry and the laundry room have been created from walls in the original

house, but almost nothing else remains from the little box they purchased 20 years ago.

One might experience the house as if living inside a geometric sculpture, moving within its space, discovering new revelations, new vistas, new perspectives and new insights about what a house can be.

One idea, "was to make something exceptionally heavy feel light," Scogin says. Even though there is a 50-foot-long concrete lap pool that is four and a half feet deep and weighs 48.8 tons, the feature doesn't dominate the lower floor.

Small details contribute to the lightness — such as the raised pilaster, not connecting to the floor, in a downstairs room where they often hang out. "By pulling it [the pilaster] off the floor, it is light as a feather," he says. "And it lightens everything up." And the steel beam across the ceiling that seems to connect to nothing? "If you take that beam down, there's not enough horizontality to the space," he says. "There's not enough contrast between the vertical and the horizontal."

The furnishings are sparse, mostly chairs — chairs by Marcel Breuer, chairs by Herman Miller, bent wood chairs from the 1930s. A table made from a piano top is in one room, presumably for dining or working. Eventually, they would like to design mobile or convertible furniture for the house. "The idea would be to have furniture that is totally abstracted," Scogin says. "You don't see anything that resembles your idea of what furniture would be."

IF THE HOUSE SEEMS TO TRANSPORT a visitor to a new place, a new perspective, it is a journey that the architects intend. Each structure by Scogin and Elam "is an adventure for the architects, and they make it an adventure for the people who experience the building as well," says Sam Frank, a principal of Synthesis, a strategic consulting firm based in Providence, R.I., and former dean of architecture and design at the Rhode Island School of Design. "They see in a very strange and wonderful way."

Critics can't seem to find one all-encompassing term to categorize the architects' style. "They are creating, in each of their buildings, an experience," says Frank. Each situation, each site, each client demands new ideas, new solutions, intellectual rigor and renewed imagination. But even their most "serious" work has a sense of play.

That is the assessment of Jeffrey Kipnis, an associate professor of architecture at Ohio State University, in *Scogin Elam and Bray: Critical Adventure/Architectural Criticism* (Rizzoli). He writes, "Play is of the essence of their work and any criticism of the work that fails to take play

into account is congenitally suspect."

The attitude of playfulness carries over to Elam and Scogin's relationship, as they constantly bounce words, ideas, jokes off of each other — as professionals discussing contemporary theories of space and architecture, or as spouses teasing and joking like Gracie Allen and George Burns.

"They are wild about each other," says long-time friend Eileen Brown. "You can't get them to say anything that borders on criticism of each other. They have this romantic interaction, this romantic tension. You realize it is a deep love affair. They are very aware of each other's gifts and talents, and that is part of the dynamic."

They married in 1974 (he has two grown children from his first marriage). They have known each other since 1961, when they met as architecture students at Georgia Institute of Technology. After graduating from Georgia Tech, they both joined Heery & Heery Architects & Engineers (he in 1967, she in 1969). Scogin eventually became President and Chief Operating Officer, Director of Design.

But much of their work at Heery & Heery was outside the city. In 1984 they formed their own firm, Scogin Elam and Bray Architects, now located downtown at 75 John Wesley Dobbs Ave. The purpose: "to get work here in Atlanta," he says, "to contribute our knowledge to Atlanta."

In the next seven years Scogin Elam and Bray designed at least a half-dozen award-winning, critically acclaimed Atlanta buildings: Among them are the High Museum of Art Folk Art and Photography in the Georgia-Pacific Center, the Clayton County Headquarters Library, the Chmar house, the Buckhead Branch of the Atlanta-Fulton County Public Library and the D. Abbott Turner Center/Turner Village at the Candler School of Theology at Emory University.

The reactions to the buildings were strong. The Clayton County Library board was pleased: It wanted a main building with accessibility, comfort, "a Kmart of information," in a strip mall of commercialization. Critic Catherine Fox of *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* praised the result, noting the library's "witty" exterior surface pattern, playing off the black-and-white mottled design on the covers of old school notebooks, and the open but private interior, a space to explore just as the mind probes new frontiers. The building won an American Institute of Architects Award for Excellence and kudos from *Time* Magazine ("practical, fun-loving avant-gardism," a Best of 1988 award). The pleased Clayton Library board gave the firm commissions for all future branches.

At the Buckhead branch of the Atlanta-Fulton County Public Library, the architects committed to creating cutting-edge architecture in a business district of not-so-distinctive bars, shops and office buildings. But they ran into the kind of criticism that often greets cutting-edge contemporary buildings. In a letter to the library board, Buckhead Coalition president Sam Massell likened the library design to a "modernistic battleship" and demanded that the board scrap the plan for a more traditional approach. The design "is not in keeping with the architecture or quality of Buckhead," Massell said, "nor would we wish it on any other neighborhood in our county."

In response, library board chairman Ann Curry said the design would be adhered to but the metal exterior would be altered to slate and the entrance changed for more openness. The completed building garnered praise from the critics. *The Washington Post's* architectural critic called the library, with its view of the downtown skyline, "a spirited inventive take on the oft-ignored architectural possibilities of the commercial strip," and the building also won a national American Institute of Architects Award for Excellence.

IN 1990 SCOGIN WAS CHOSEN AS THE first southerner to chair Harvard University's Graduate School of Design. He held the rotating chairmanship for five years, as the couple commuted and also worked out of a Boston office. To their disappointment the majority of Scogin Elam and Bray's clients and recognition now come from outside Atlanta.

"We have invested our lives here — I have, and Merrill's been here since 1961, and we've worked very hard at educating ourselves, formally and otherwise. Not that you would expect people to agree with your direction. But we get very good recognition outside Atlanta, at least we are very well respected in practice and education. And here in Atlanta it's been very disappointing not to get that same kind of recognition."

In the meantime, they continue to shine in a broader context. Scogin Elam and Bray have just completed a competition to design the Rudolph Laban Center of Dance in London; they were among six internationally known architects and the only American firm chosen from 150 entrants to prepare final designs. This spring they are working on a by-invitation-only competition for an expansion to the Bank of International Settlements in Basel, Switzerland, where they were among 11 architects chosen from 250 entrants to submit. (They engage in such competitions, he says, because they force them to "expand, push ourselves.") They are also designing a dormitory at Tulane University and the Riverdale branch library in ever-supportive Clayton County, as

well as houses in Boston and Maine.

Their venues also include popular ones; Scogin and Elam are at work on a "House of the Future" project for *House Beautiful* Magazine. "Our idea was to try to somehow come back to the city and build houses in a way on these smaller lots, literally parking lots, so you felt you were getting all the advantages of suburban living right downtown — a bit of a trick," he laughs. "Your lot might be 20 feet wide and 300 feet long. . . . You are forced to share it with other residents. . . . You've got to give them air rights over your property. . . . And you get air rights over their property." As the architects now conceive the still-in-progress plan, Elam says there might be a structure, perhaps 20 feet by 300 feet, of up to five floors with "visual ownership" of a larger area, such as a wall and garden 200 feet away.

Their concept of an architect, in part, is one who "pushes the state of the art," and stretches the imagination.

"Why wouldn't you push the idea of what you can do?" Scogin asks. "In today's world, if you were going to buy a car, you wouldn't make it out of materials that are going to rust in two or three years. You would make it out of advanced materials, advanced technology, and the style would somehow reflect that. The car you are going to take to work and for a drive across the U.S. — you are going to want the state of the art. That's obvious.

"Well, why wouldn't you want the same for a house?" he asks, sitting in a big leather chair looking through the spaces and planes of his house, through the large expanses of glass he calls "plates of transparency" or "voids in the exterior skin" of the building. "It almost makes no sense to do anything but that. You can't fathom why people don't want that. Let me think now, why would people want a dormer window with 4,000 little panes of glass when they can have a sheet of glass with absolutely no panes and unrestricted vision out?"

"What challenges people with a house like this is they aren't familiar with windows like that," he says, sitting in a room of the Brookwood Hills home where almost nothing is visible of what was present 20 years ago. "They are not familiar with something (like the column) that doesn't go all the way to the floor and doesn't look like it's stable. They get uncomfortable because of the fact it is not familiar. We like things that are unfamiliar." ■

Executive editor Emma Edmunds lives in a traditional home with built-in bookshelves and kitchen cabinets, but would welcome a lap pool in her bedroom.

THROUGH THICK AND THIN

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would give me an immediate energy boost.

Next I was examined by the doctor who listened to my heart and lungs with his stethoscope. He liked what he heard and was ready to prescribe the phentermine. (If the \$30 blood test "finds anything to worry about," he said, they would give me a call and tell me to lay off the drugs). When I asked him what would happen to my weight when I went off the drugs, he said, "You'll have to be sure you make some lifestyle and dietary changes while you're on the medication," though nothing at the clinic seems geared towards teaching you how to change those habits. They gave me no diet or exercise plan to follow. However, the "nurse" told me I could call her or their staff RN "any time" with any nutritional or dietary questions that might pop up.

The cost for the initial visit is \$70, plus \$30 for the blood test, \$15–20 per month for medication and \$30 for monthly follow-up visits; optional B-12 shots are \$15–20. If I follow Ashford's plan for three months, as suggested, my cost will be about \$220, or \$11 per pound.

Experts' comments: The consent form is screaming out the risk here, in Anderson's opinion. "I'm concerned they're telling you to ignore FDA recommendations and that they have certain of their staff posing as health professionals." Again, there is no real effort to change dietary or lifestyle habits, says Hixon. "It's a weight-loss center and they're not talking about food or calories, only drugs and the speed at which you can lose. Yikes." **Ashford Medical's response:** Owner Connie Couch points out that several doctors circulate among Ashford's four sites; at the Decatur location, there is a registered nurse and nutritionist who train the medical assistants such as the woman who identified herself to the reporter as a nurse. "This is a very biased article," she said, "full of inaccuracies," which she declined to specify.

6. DeKalb Medical Center, 2665 N. Decatur Road, Decatur, Weight Loss For Life. This hospital-based weight-loss program operates within the DMC's Wellness Center, which offers a range of fitness and nutrition programs. Weight Loss For Life is the hospital's 12-week course of two-hour lifestyle classes, which costs \$120. It is designed to teach people how to change their dietary habits, to be aware of food's fat/caloric/carbohydrate content and to incorporate regular exercise into their life-styles. The first hour includes a weigh-in and support group discussion similar to Weight Watchers, although it is led by a registered dietitian. The second hour is educational. Lecture topics include developing a personal diet plan, fat cells vs. muscle cells, stress management, meal

planning, exercise and grocery shopping.

Before enrolling in the program I was encouraged to meet for a nutrition counseling session with Carol Thomason, a registered, licensed dietitian who coordinates the weight-loss program here (and at Piedmont Hospital). She charges \$45 for the first one-hour session, then \$25 for any half-hour subsequent visits.

I met with Thomason in her office at the Wellness Center, which is located in a professional building across from the hospital in Decatur. Based on my height, weight, age and self-reported eating and exercise habits, she came up with a 1,500-calorie diet plan that included 194 g of carbohydrates, 77 g of protein and 48 g of fat per day. She gave me handouts developed by the ADA that detail portion sizes and food exchange plans for each food category in the diet plan (starches/breads, meats, vegetables, fruits, dairy, and fat). She also gave me some tips on healthy eating and encouraged me to include at least two more aerobic workouts per week if I wanted to lose the two pounds per week I said I did. I told her my goal was to lose 20 pounds, and she thought I could safely double that amount, though she said the ultimate goal was to get my body fat down to about 25 percent.

Thomason said she never recommends appetite suppressants, which are "only recommended for the really obese."

She gave me a tour of the wellness center, where membership costs \$38 a month (with no initiation fee) but made no effort to get me to join.

The cost: \$45 for nutrition counseling; \$45 for fitness appraisal at the gym; \$120 for 12 weeks of lifestyle classes; \$152 for four months of wellness center membership, or \$362 total, or \$18 per pound.

Experts' comments: "Good news!" says Anderson, who likes the program's medically sound, "comprehensive and practical" approach to weight loss and its "realistic goals with realistic time frames." She advises people who do not already exercise to get the okay from their physicians before joining such a workout facility. Hixon likes the reasonable price and the fact that they incorporate "education and group support" into their dietary and fitness regime. She thinks the 1,500-calorie diet for me sounds about right. Everett notes, "This program is strong on changing behaviors, attacking what drives people to eat. That's very important. I like the gym option, too. They're promoting better habits and not inviting people to become dependent on the center." ■

Jill Jordan Sieder, an Atlanta freelance writer, is still struggling to wean herself from tortilla chips and cheese.