



# WHEREVER HOME IS

Renowned Charlotte-based architect Ruard Veltman channels the heart of Dutch culture, *Gezelligheid*, in his creative and inviting designs.



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PHOTOS OF WORK PROVIDED BY **RUARD VELTMAN ARCHITECTURE,**  
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Nationally renowned architect Ruard Veltman isn't sure what he'd be doing if he hadn't grown up in America. He's not entirely American, and in fact fits no mold easily: "I was made in France, born in Germany, and raised in the States," he intones jovially, "but I'm Dutch." Tall, approachable, and with little hint of an accent betraying his origins, Ruard is well-accustomed to clarifying his nationality. "People insist that I'm American, but I'm not: I was raised in the United States, yes, but by a very Dutch family," Ruard explains, "and that makes all the difference."

A first impression, it seems, isn't always the correct impression. Step inside a Ruard Veltman home, and find this fact nestled in every corner of the floorplan, in every fold of enveloping hallway, in every contented resident: No one design facet is easily classified, but it all adds up to one hell of an inviting place.

American or not, Ruard's been all over. After an extremely Dutch childhood in South Carolina and countless visits to his parents' homeland of Holland,

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Ruard's college career took him further south. He was mentored by MacArthur Genius Samuel "Sambo" Mockbee in Auburn University's School of Architecture Rural Studio. He was trained by McAlpine Tankersley Architecture in Montgomery, Alabama before making his way northward to the "slightly less sweltering" Queen City. Along with his Bald Head Island Studio, Charlotte is Ruard's home base, but his architecture studio is at all times embroiled in a wide array of projects nationwide — each of them an exciting departure in style from the last. "I don't ever want to be stuck in one place, designing one kind of home," Ruard says, and his choice of project reflects this drive.

Even his most familiar-looking projects are deceptively unique. Nothing in a Ruard Veltman design is exactly what it appears. Like Ruard himself, the architecture looks American — sometimes Charlottean, even, to a degree — but it's not quite of this town or this land. Not unlike much of "American" architecture, it is reminiscent of all the things romantic European townscapes do properly, but it exists without founding itself solely on those things. Everything familiar in a Ruard Veltman design is familiar only fleetingly, the way a swanky new chair feels if it occupies the same spot a beloved-but-overused seat once did. His Mediterranean villas typically spring up in warmer climates and often include pools, sure, but he has no reservations about deconstructing and restructuring the Mediterranean concept around an uncharacteristically temperamental forecast. His English cottages are English, but without all the trappings of turn-of-the-century brick masonry and politely front-facing doors: He uses whatever exterior brick he (or his client) fancies, and places his front door as rudely to the side and below-grade as he chooses. He's Ruard Veltman, and he's not English...or southern European, for that matter. Ruard's architecture is beautiful in that it's just American enough, just foreign enough — just different enough to be Ruard's.



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Ruard's time in Alabama cultivated in him a deep-seated love for the South and its sense of hospitality, which Ruard believes is far more than a stereotype. It truly is a way of life down here, and one with which his own upbringing easily coalesces: The features which qualify each Veltman home as genre-breaking vary from project to project, but there's one theme which makes them all decisively his. In every Veltman home is a concentrated coziness. Each is designed to evoke a distinct warmth and comfortability, and he actually has a word for that feeling. His architecture is built on *gezelligheid*, an untranslatable Dutch term and a concept that's been said to encompass the heart of Dutch culture. *Gezelligheid* has no real equivalent in English, but that doesn't stop Ruard, who's fluent in both languages, from trying to define it. It's convivial, like "eating and drinking around a table with loved ones." It's being surrounded by people whose company is desirable. It's all those settings you crave when you're not in them. At its most basic, *gezelligheid* seems a feeling of utter contentment with one's surroundings. "If I'm going to design a home for you," Ruard stresses, "I want you to want to be there."

His designs are so welcoming that sometimes even he doesn't want to leave them, the way a clingy artist can't part with his most emotive work. He's not content to merely design a structure. The two interior design arms of his business, Veltman Meubles (Dutch for "furniture") and Veltman Wood Interiors (a collaboration with interior designer Julia Wood), ensure that Ruard and his studio remain involved in that final part of home-making. He also maintains a connection with his ideas while they're becoming reality: "I love designing, but I love the process of construction too," Ruard muses. "I love visiting a jobsite, talking to the crew — witnessing the camaraderie: There's a certain amount of *gezelligheid* that happens during construction." Ruard and the



RUARD VELTMAN IN THE RVA COURTYARD

building crew have to witness a living space being constructed around them, until suddenly they're forced to move out of their new home. "We bond in these things before they're ever lived in, and at some point, it almost becomes our house," he laughs. "I think that's a beautiful, wonderful thing, that everyone working on these homes feels a proud kind of love for their work, their art."

And it is art — every beam, every floor pattern is a point of attraction. Architecture can be beautiful, and it can be aesthetically pleasing. It can be art, but Ruard believes that, above all, it should be lived-in art. A home's primary purpose should be housing its inhabitants "in a *gezellig* way."

With a surplus of successful projects and acclaim all over the country, architect Ruard Veltman isn't sure what he'd be doing if he hadn't grown up in America, but he well knows what he's doing since he is here. He's hard at work creating lifestyles with architecture, and he does so with the help of an immensely talented team. His job is never lonely; his finished designs always feel *gezellig* because his life is filled with *gezelligheid*, and this may be the best English translation we have for that elusive concept: "*Gezelligheid*" is whatever and wherever "home" is. Ruard's in the business of crafting the founding principle of Dutch culture. It's all rather fitting.

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