



A Place of His Own

When the hubbub surrounding his archaeological find grows too intense, Thomas Parker retreats to his family's great room.



Unearthing what may be the world's oldest Christian church proved a great coup for archaeologist and historian Thomas Parker. Near the coastal town of Aqaba in Jordan, the mud structure from the late third or early fourth century represents one of the oldest surviving buildings made for Christian worship. Before then, persecuted Christians met in homes to avoid being tossed to the lions.

Hungry for details about the find, journalists descended upon the North Carolina State University professor. "Media attention is a double-edged sword," Thomas says. "It takes time away from the work, but it gives the public a better understanding of archaeology."

He has enjoyed the hoopla, but he cherishes even more the time spent with his family in their Raleigh home. Here, Thomas, wife Mary Mattocks, and daughter Grace, 6, come together. "The great room is my

favorite," he says. "It gets me out of the hustle and bustle of my office."

Cathedral ceilings and a bank of windows give the room airy appeal. Sliding glass doors offer a view of Shelly Lake and lead to the deck designed by Mary, a landscape architect. "There's a beautiful piece of furniture made in Austria around 1930 where we keep china and glass," he adds.

The tight-knit family often travels together when Thomas and a bevy of scholars and students return to the site in Jordan. "It takes a team of specialists to do an archaeological dig correctly," Thomas says. "The days of Indiana Jones and the solitary archaeologist are long past."

Maybe Thomas could give Indy a few pointers on where to find true treasure—in the quiet sanctuary of hearth and home.

Nancy Dorman-Hickson