

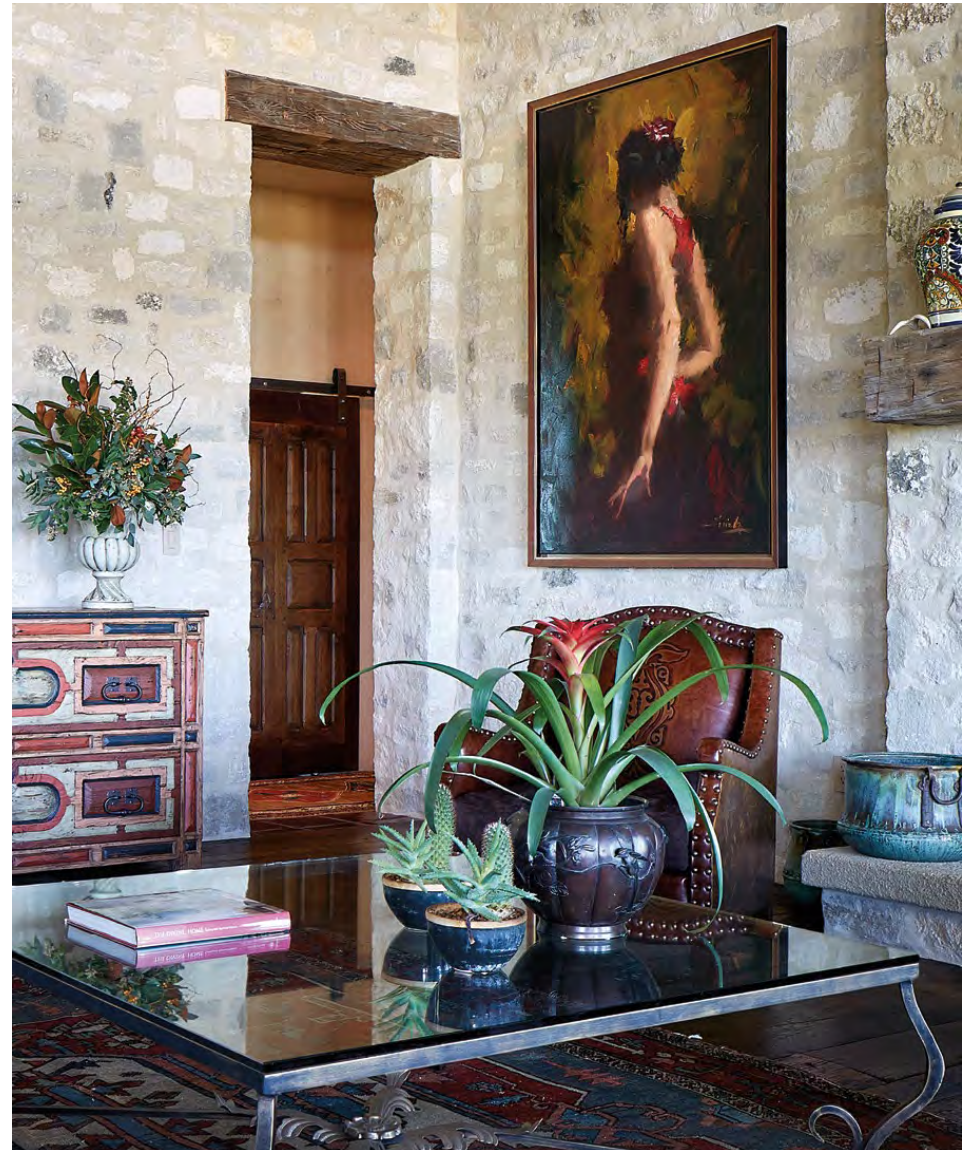
At Home



in the HILLS

Texas boasts a rich history, and one family's home, nestled in the picturesque Hill Country region of the Lone Star State, aims to bring the past to life.

BY JENN SCHLEICH
PHOTOGRAPHY BY DROR BALDINGER



The

In the O'Mesa House, every detail, and every nuanced element of design, comes down to its locale. The sprawling home was built with such attention to the region's cultural identity, a glance can leave you wondering what stories it could tell; despite its young years, it looks as though it has always stood there. Construction began in 2009, and despite the appearance of finality, to its owners and collaborators, the property might never be considered complete. But youth, in this case, is no indicator of experience—the home has plenty of tales to tell. Tales of texture, authenticity, heritage, and hard work.

Based on a historical U-shaped courtyard design consisting of a main house and three linked casitas, the O'Mesa House is steeped in the texture of age. Achieving such a feat was complicated, and its successful execution came down to care and collaboration. Designed by Amy Slaughter of Slaughter Design Studio, the home was brought to fruition by Cary Kipp of Kipp Flores Architects and builder Jim Donaldson (D2 Construction).

"I have to tell you that even today I am still working on this home," admits Slaughter. "It's not a project that you ever really finish. It's one of a kind, and the homeowners are always seeking special art and accessories."

Authentically rebuilding the past does not come easily, and the replication of important settlement-period details was a long labour of love. Sourcing materials, like the antique American Oak flooring, the original Mexican Colonial doors, and the plaster for the walls was particularly time



FLOORING: The reclaimed American Oak hardwood flooring yielded wider planks. The back edge of the salvaged lumber was milled flat for proper installation.

LANDSCAPING: An emphasis was put on indigenous plant species that are drought resilient and deer-proof to survive severe summer droughts and freezing winter temperatures.

BALCONIES: Characteristic of the region's historic homes, the deep balconies and porches are built to withstand severe rain and wind.

CASITAS: The home's three casitas, each a stand-alone unit, can only be entered from the courtyard, common to historic Spanish Colonial design.



consuming. Aligning the joints and junctions of the home to meet evenly, despite the varying surfaces of the reclaimed materials used to build it, was achievable only through Donaldson's preternatural skill and devotion.

"The material selection took a long time to procure, and then getting it in seamlessly..." she trails off. "All those details added to the unique character of the house."

The home's rich décor and design is a reflection of the intersection of cultures in the Texas Hill Country. The timber-framing influence of German immigration (seen in the home's own frame), the Mexican influence of iron grillwork, the custom high-fired clay tiles (by Rahnee Gladwin of iDesign Tile) from Spanish Colonial design, and, of course, the lasting imprint of indigenous Native American aesthetics. Every door in the home, for example, is an antique Mexican Colonial door, and each one of them is different.

"The homeowners wanted to pull together these three cultures as a form of tribute, and that's where all the textures stem from," explains Slaughter. "We did a lot of research and went to the Smithsonian online photographic archives to research Native American tribes who lived here at the time and paid attention to their traditional garb. One of the things we noticed in the photos was that the buildings in which [the Aborigines] were posing didn't have baseboards. I've only seen [walls without baseboards] in very modern homes, and it's a refreshing change."

Slaughter, Donaldson, and the homeowners also toured other, older Texas Hill Country properties to study the architectural details and to learn how the stone was laid on the buildings (the scale, the colour, and how it overlapped).

Texture is the overarching feature of the home's design. The chip-faced rock of the limestone exterior and interior, the undulating floors, the woollen pillows, and of course all the antiques produce a tactile environment. The interior walls are comprised of an integrated coloured plaster; an acrylic-based product hand-troweled to emulate the look of old lath and plaster. Though in reality it is only one colour, the material produces a visual illusion of different values, creating texture without actual texture. Similar to the home itself, which reflects history without actually being historical.

"The tactile environment was a byproduct, honestly. I was really pushing for authentic materials," says Slaughter. "The homeowners' desire was to have the home look as though it were here 100 years ago, and it will be here for at least 100 more."

The design—the durable materials and the décor—does leave you with an idea of permanence. The O'Mesa House may only be a few years young, but Slaughter hits the mark; with the proper care there's no reason it couldn't stand among the Texas Hill Country for far longer than 100 years. ♦