



Come Together

A big idea and
unexpected layout
are the building
blocks for a
peaceful family
retreat

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Photography by Dror Baldinger





The main living room (right and below) features walls of windows on both sides, giving the space the feel of a sunroom; the kitchen (top and left) has clerestory windows that allow light in while still providing privacy from the nearby neighbors.



Come nightfall in Cordillera Ranch, with San Antonio's intense city lights far off in the distance, the stars can shine bright in this part of Texas. In a new residence in the gated community, a family is making the most of it. Visiting grandchildren might be roasting marshmallows for s'mores on the fire pit, running circles around the courtyard or stargazing and drawing constellations beside their proud grandparents.

That's just as the homeowners planned it.

Nestled among Cordillera Ranch's nearly 600 homes, which includes expansive Spanish-revival estates, Tuscan-inspired villas and luxury residences, theirs is a home not quite like the others in the exclusive neighborhood just outside of Boerne.

The homeowners (empty nesters) were in search of a home that would warmly welcome family from opposite coasts and their older parents in San Antonio yet give guests their privacy. Working with

architect Craig McMahon, they devised a stunning 3,600-square-foot, four-bedroom, four-and-a-half bathroom Texas contemporary ranch home where everyone could come together.

Set on a 1.1-acre lot, the home McMahon's clients envisioned wasn't nearly as palatial as neighboring houses. Instead of a sizable floor plan, their priorities largely focused on creating serene surroundings, cultivating an enjoyable style of living and being hospitable. "It's not about making a house big," says the homeowner. "It's about the experience of enjoying it, how you live in it and how it fits in nature. That is exactly what we have."

While the total square footage is ample, the residence was designed as two modest zones—a 2,800-square-foot main home and an 800-square-foot guest home with a separate entrance—creating a Santa Fe-style layout surrounding a central, adjoining courtyard.



“The courtyard is your first experience,” says McMahon. This 50-foot-by-50-foot green space just off of the curvy driveway is as critical to the home—and to the way the homeowners live in it—as any interior space. It’s also the first area that greets people. “It’s a different approach,” says McMahon. But it’s one that the homeowners love.

A central fire pit lights with the push of a button and becomes a hub of activity, while a trickling water fountain adds a soothing soundtrack to everyday life. An extended patio with extra seating and outdoor dining leads immediately to a spectacular main room with floor-to-ceiling glass walls that offer uninterrupted views of both the private inner courtyard, the Hill Country and Cordillera Ranch Golf Club. Locally sourced limestone and rustic steel finishes are used throughout the

property creating cohesion between the interior and exterior spaces and paying homage to the homeowners’ deep Texas roots, summers spent in Bandera and a love of riverfront properties in Blanco. Red-brown Douglas fir woods complement the organic color palette and warm up the stone and steel features and black hardware.

“We spend probably 85 percent of our time in the main room,” says the homeowner. “To (us) it’s one room; it’s the inside-outside. It’s really where we live.”

That said, you’ll find no big-screen television and no entertainment system in this living space. The real show is outside where nature is the main attraction. The windows, while flooding the home with natural light, are also positioned to take advantage of the prevailing winds

bringing the breeze through the home, passively cooling it and helping to conserve energy.

Care was taken to preserve many of the lot’s large oak trees that surround the home making it feel secluded and private. A green approach to landscaping, including using some of the natural grasses already on the property, helped to retain as much of the ranch-home feel as possible, says McMahon. Local fauna help set the scene, too, including a friendly roadrunner that has become a frequent guest of the courtyard.

There are no hallways in the home, no wasted space, which allows for nearly every room to have a direct connection to the outdoors, says McMahon. “It expands the livable footprint of the home times two,” he says. “You are able to use the outdoors as much as the indoors.”



In order to keep the home one level, the main deck (left) had to be cantilevered six feet above the ground; the guest house (above) sits across the courtyard from the main house.



The deck (right), which can be accessed off the main living room, faces the golf course; like the rest of the house, the master bedroom (above) and bathroom (left) have features that will allow the homeowners to age in place, such as wide doors.



Just across the courtyard, the guest quarters await visitors. “It’s our Sunday house,” says the homeowner. Like in the main home, Lueders limestone is used inside and out. Wood ceilings and a metal roof are nods to the original Sunday homes—quaint weekend homes that were popular in Central Texas’ German communities in the 1800s. Many of those have been converted to inns. “That was the design concept that I had in mind,” the homeowner says. “I wanted the stone like a Sunday house; I wanted to look out back and see our Sunday house.”

Visitors, too, can gaze out the Sunday house’s windows to the main house, through its window walls and on to the rolling hills beyond. It is self-contained with a separate entrance, laundry, kitchenette and two bedrooms and bathrooms. “We planned that because we wanted to make it available even if we weren’t home,” says the homeowner. Visitors can socialize in the courtyard then retire to the Sunday house where every main living space opens to the outside.

When no guests are present, the main home is perfect for the homeowners—for both today and tomorrow. The one-level living concept is built with features that comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act, meaning the residents can age in place more safely. Accessi-

ble features such as wider entrances and a level connection from the main house to the guest house make for easier navigation throughout. Materials used need minimal maintenance, and all wood is protected or coated in bullet-proof sealer.

The home’s thoughtful style and its forward-thinking design have won McMahon seven awards, including the 2017 Home of the Year Award featured in the Best in American Living Awards from the National Association of Home Builders. “We knew we loved our home, but we just didn’t know there were a lot of others who loved it, too,” says the homeowner. “Even without the awards (McMahon has) won, we still feel like winners.”