



# MODERN RETREAT

By Julie Catalano Photography by Dror Baldinger

*When their son left for college, the parents eagerly set out on a new life stage of their own — a custom home that would house their interests, collections and love of entertaining. All were achieved in a warm, luxurious home that serves as both a haven and a hub.*



**T**he lush, wooded .843-acre lot in central Dallas was perfect, down to the imposing stands of pecan and cedar trees and the picturesque pond shared with neighbors. Unlike most of pancake-flat Dallas, however, the trapezoidal wedge-like parcel has an 18-foot grade change that needed an architect with a track record in slope-wrangling.

Enter James LaRue, AIA, principal of LaRue Architects in Austin. “There’s not a flat spot in this city,” says LaRue, who has decades of experience in setting high-end luxury properties on hilly Austin terrain.



The first meeting with the homeowners resulted in a concept and sketch of how the 4,599-square foot multi-level home should sit on and fill the sloping lot in Dallas, and how the home would best serve its inhabitants. “They are a neat couple,” says LaRue. “Both play golf, work from home, and love to swim, work out and entertain their many friends.”

From there it was easy to define the specifics important to the husband and wife, says LaRue: “Lap pool, exercise room,

office and a place for their exquisite collection of heirloom glass were priorities. That part came together pretty quick.”

Barry Buford, president of BufordHawthorne Builders in Dallas, joined the team after the design phase to begin construction, including 20+ concrete pours required to achieve the perfectly balanced multi-level design. “Because of the grade change, they had to be stacked,” he says. “Our concrete work took a lot of effort.”

It paid off. The effect is stunning, with the illusion of numerous levels (in reality, only three), where terraces, steps, overhangs and balconies convey a beautifully layered design using durable and impeccable materials — board formed concrete, dry stacked stone, sealed mahogany siding, metal roof, metal clad fascias and generous expanses of glass including butt-glazed corner windows with clear sight lines. There is a two-car garage on the entry level.



The open floor plan on the entry level more than fulfilled the couple's requirements for entertaining, with a Bulthaup luxury kitchen, dining and living areas and a glass-enclosed wine room. The office is adjacent to these spaces, and combined create a gallery-like area that provides serene and inspiring outdoor views. The master suite enjoys seclusion at the other end.

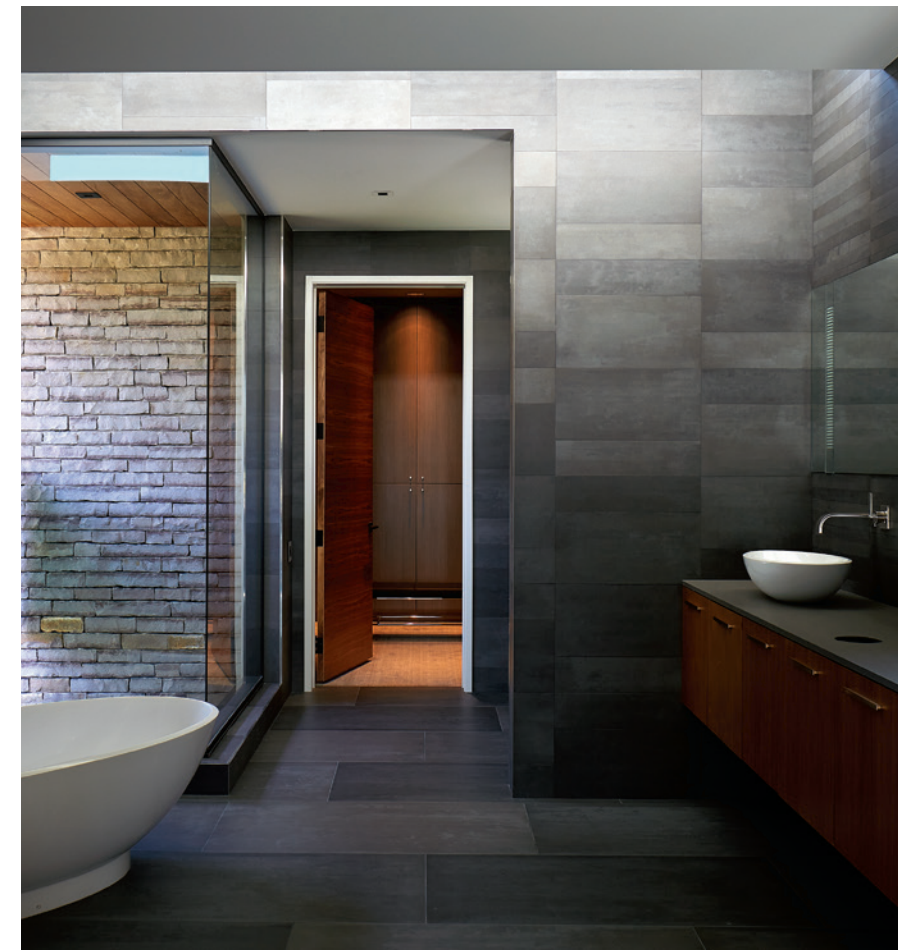
Rift and quartered white oak flooring was installed throughout, except in the baths and the foyer, where Mosa Terra Tones XXL 24 x 48 by Knoxite were installed. A sleek floating staircase of white oak and steel on the entry level leads to additional bedrooms on the upper level. Mahogany paneling around the living area fireplace is from The Wood Gallery, Inc., in Dallas.

A special request from the homeowners had a sentimental connection to a material that a cherished family member had helped the wife select. The loved one passed before the house was finished, but the Chopped Ozark Blue Stone by Oldcastle holds a prominent place — as the exterior stone that extends into the interior, as the backdrop wall behind the grand piano in the foyer, and as the headboard in the master suite. "That stone was very important, inside and out," says LaRue.

An essential element of the design from day one was the

25-meter true lap pool, surrounded by Lueders limestone decking. In fact, because the lot is long and narrow and difficult to access, the lap pool was installed before construction began on the house. A unique feature of the long pool is a full height clear acrylic panel at the far end that faces the pond — a stunning way to establish a visual water-to-water connection.

In a Texas climate, energy savings are paramount, and "the biggest energy feature is the geothermal system that heats and cools using circulating water," says Buford. The system, by Carrier Air Conditioning, uses 400-foot-deep wells drilled around and under the house. "It's very eco-friendly," says Buford. "There is still some electricity involved but not much compared to conventional forced air equipment." The builder also used a Fleetwood custom luxury high-efficiency window package with thermally broken aluminum windows. Lutron motorized window treatments help to deflect heat.





# Bella Villa

# ShelfGenie

Another kind of green adorns the roof of the 800-square foot detached game room by the pond. Slow-growing grass keeps maintenance low. Best of all, views from the main house are not marred by metal rooftop reflections; the grass-covered roof blends in with the surrounding green to make it part of the sloping landscape. Called the Longhorn Room, the cozy space with amenities serves as a place for overnight guests and a fun space to watch and enjoy the big game. Non-sports enthusiasts can retreat to a spot on the patio to watch the ducks on the pond.

Both builder and architect have a favorite feature of the mid-century modern home, although it would seem almost impossible to choose just one. “The light in the house is amazing,” says Buford. “A lot of homes are dark and then you have to

help with artificial lighting. Not this one. The light coming in from all the different vantage points is spectacular.”

For LaRue, who remembers vividly when the exquisite abode was just a sketch, narrowing it down was a challenge. He cites the little bridge that leads to the office, jewel-box glass corners, multi-level outdoor spaces, broad overhangs and finally, the place where it all began as his favorite: “The way the house sits on the lot.” ♦

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