

A GRUPPO ARCHITECTS

by Canan Yetmen

©dror baldinger, FAIA

©charles davis smith, FAIA

When longtime friends Andrew Nance and Thad Reeves joined forces in 2005 to form A Gruppo Architects, first as a traditional architectural design firm, and later, as a design build firm it was a logical outgrowth of their shared ideas about architecture, design, and construction. Native Texans, and friends since their undergraduate days at the University of Texas at Arlington, the two had discussed collaborating while they both worked in other offices - Nance in New York and Colorado before retuning to Texas, and Reeves, a native of Burleson, had cut his teeth at two Dallas firms. Eventually they took the plunge and founded A Gruppo based on the shared professional goal to create a firm as a platform to explore the possibilities and capabilities of design. "Plus, we disagreed on enough things to make it interesting," Reeves adds. The two designers cultivated a firm culture that emphasizes constant inquiry and pushing for new solutions.

Maybe it's the fact that both partners also have teaching experience - Nance at UT Arlington and now at Texas State University and Reeves at UT Arlington - that makes them willing to both offer and hear critique, incubate ideas, and maintain that sense of exploration in every project. "Being willing to take the critique of ourselves has been integral for the partnership," says Nance. Reeves agrees. "We take that critical discourse and bring that to bear on the whole studio and have that dialogue with the employees we work with every day." And while they admit that it's not always easy, they agree that it's key to making the partnership work.





As the firm grew, Nance and Reeves collaborated with other colleagues to continually deepen their own understanding and draw on others' expertise, including, in many cases, their former students. That spirit informed the name of the firm from the get-go, with the two partners interested in neither a strict hierarchy of roles nor a focus on individual ego or identity. The name A Gruppo, a subtle nod to architectural roots formed in the Italian Renaissance, denotes not only a group of people, but also a group effort. That notion expanded further when the firm began to build most of its own projects, allowing the architects to directly influence every aspect of the work and to continue to develop ideas and solutions well into the construction phase. Today, the team works in a dual-office set-up with Nance in San Marcos and Reeves in Dallas. The arrangement allows them to easily expand their work to different areas of the state and to adapt to the natural ebb and flow of architectural projects more flexibly. And, it allows for more innovation. "When we build our work, we learn and make the next iteration better," says Nance.

That sense of investigation is a driving force in A Gruppo's work. Focused on residential and small commercial projects, each project builds on a predecessor, either in terms of material exploration or construction technology. Off-site fabrication and use of structurally insulated panels, for example, help reduce time, cost and construction site waste for budget and environmentally conscious clients. A Gruppo have completed projects that rely entirely on rainwater capture to supply the home and continually apply tried-and-true technologies – solar orientation and capturing prevailing breezes – to their work. "We are always looking at a products or at building methods and thinking about how it will hold up in 10, 20 or 50 years," Nance says. "Building science is always evolving and we try to implement as many new things as clients and budgets will allow." Reeves adds. "That approach has made us better architects, and as we suspected, has allowed us



to produce a better product for our clients."

With a growing list of Central Texas projects that have received wide acclaim, A Gruppo have developed a distinctly modern Hill Country vernacular still rooted in the well-visited building traditions of the region. The topography and landscape that enchants so many Texans was a revelation Nance, who grew up under the big West Texas sky and first saw the rolling hills and winding rivers on a trip to San Marcos. "I honestly couldn't believe I was still in Texas," he recalls. Working here, the partners draw inspiration from what Reeves calls its "mystique" – its history and landscape – to find and bring to life those interesting architectural moments that enrich daily life. And, A Gruppo is further inspired

“THE NAME A GRUPPO, A SUBTLE NOD TO ARCHITECTURAL ROOTS FORMED IN THE ITALIAN RENAISSANCE, DENOTES NOT ONLY A GROUP OF PEOPLE, BUT ALSO A GROUP EFFORT.



by their interesting clients, many of whom are commissioning a house for the first time, and bring their own ideas to the table, excited to take the plunge to create something new and unexpected. For Reeves that's the essence of the collaboration he and Nance set out to manifest. "Our job is to listen and take what they are telling us and synthesize something we would not come up with separately," he says. "That's when it really works well. In the end most of our clients become really great friends."

