



NEIGHBORHOOD
SHOAL CREEK

SQUARE FEET
3,200

BEDROOMS
3

BATHROOMS
2 FULL, 1 HALF

DESIGNER
DARWIN HARRISON

BUILDER
DARWIN HARRISON
AND JAVIER GONZALEZ

LIGHTING DESIGNER
JILL KLORES

GREEN ACRE

A window-filled Shoal Creek home stands among the trees

By Sarah Thurmond

Darwin Harrison and his partner, Robert Buckner, never thought the day would come when a pristine, tree-filled lot on their street in Shoal Creek would become available. They often admired it as they passed by and wondered if the owner would ever sell it. Then one day, they saw a sign that the land was up for grabs.

“We bought it in like a couple of days. We knew it was quite a find,” Harrison says.

But as easy as it was to get the land, the hard part came when figuring out how to build on it. The 1-acre plot was originally part of a three-lot property. The original owners built a house on two of the lots, then used the third as a side yard.

“From the day that it was plotted, it had never been developed, which was kind of cool,” Buckner says.

However, the patriarch, an amateur botanist, had cultivated trees on the land, and Harrison and Buckner soon learned that many of them were protected and heritage trees. Concern among neighbors was intense. At one point during construction of the couple’s dream home, neighbors notified the city when they thought trees were being cut down. But Harrison, who has a degree in architecture, was careful to work with the city arborist and design a home where ultimately only two small trees, both unprotected, were removed.

When it came to the house’s design, Harrison struggled and eventually gave up on creating something “cutting edge and avant-garde.” Instead, he found inspiration in a basic gable shape, like a child’s drawing of a house, with a linear floor plan. The three-bedroom, two-and-a-half-bathroom house has sections that extend off a common axis: a 102-foot hallway.



Clockwise from top: The galley kitchen is raised up a step from the living room to create its own zone; the vaulted living room has a massive wall made of TexaStone; natural light pours into the 102-foot hallway.

Along one side of the hallway, there's a large open-concept living room and galley kitchen (raised a step to create its own zone), two guest bedrooms, a utility room, and the master suite. Extending off the other side are Harrison's office, as well as the dining room and Buckner's office/reading room (both also raised a step). Interspersed among the sections are outdoor courtyards, including a large, closed-off one where the couple's Dalmatian, Louie, can be let out for evening frolicking.

For the interior, Harrison saw an opportunity to experiment with different materials. His office has rammed earth walls that provide a cozy, private space for him to work and listen to his vast CD collection. In the vaulted living room, a massive wall made of TexaStone from Garden City, Texas, has a commanding presence, but wood floors help ground the space. For the dining room and Buckner's office, Harrison chose skinny red Roman bricks, which add warmth and a subtle midcentury vibe to the spaces.

Special touches add surprising textures, like dark beveled metal shingles that cover a wall in a courtyard and extend into an interior hallway, creating a bit of drama to an otherwise overlooked part of a house, and Legos from Harrison's youth that were placed in the rammed earth wall.

Throughout the home is the couple's extensive curated collection of artwork. West Texas, where both Harrison and Buckner grew up, is the overall theme. A long gallery wall displays Harrison's photography of old West Texas buildings, and a display case houses a bronze tumbleweed by local artist Bale Creek Allen.

Lighting is also used to set moods and highlight certain spaces. Lighting designer Jill Klores positioned lights to showcase a large painting over the fireplace in the living room and used a colored light effect to create what she calls "a poor man's James Turrell" skylight in the hallway by Buckner's office.

Although the couple likes to maintain privacy, windows are everywhere in the home. Since moving into their residence three years ago, Harrison and Buckner have grown accustomed to their neighbors' curiosity over the house. They've hosted neighborhood Christmas parties and wave at passersby, who can see the couple as they eat in the kitchen's breakfast nook, which sits in a corner closed off by glass walls. The couple says it can feel like you're in a park, but that's what makes it a special place. "We bought the lot primarily because of the trees," Buckner says. "We like this urban forest that we've built here." ▲



Windows are everywhere in the home, which they call an 'urban forest.'