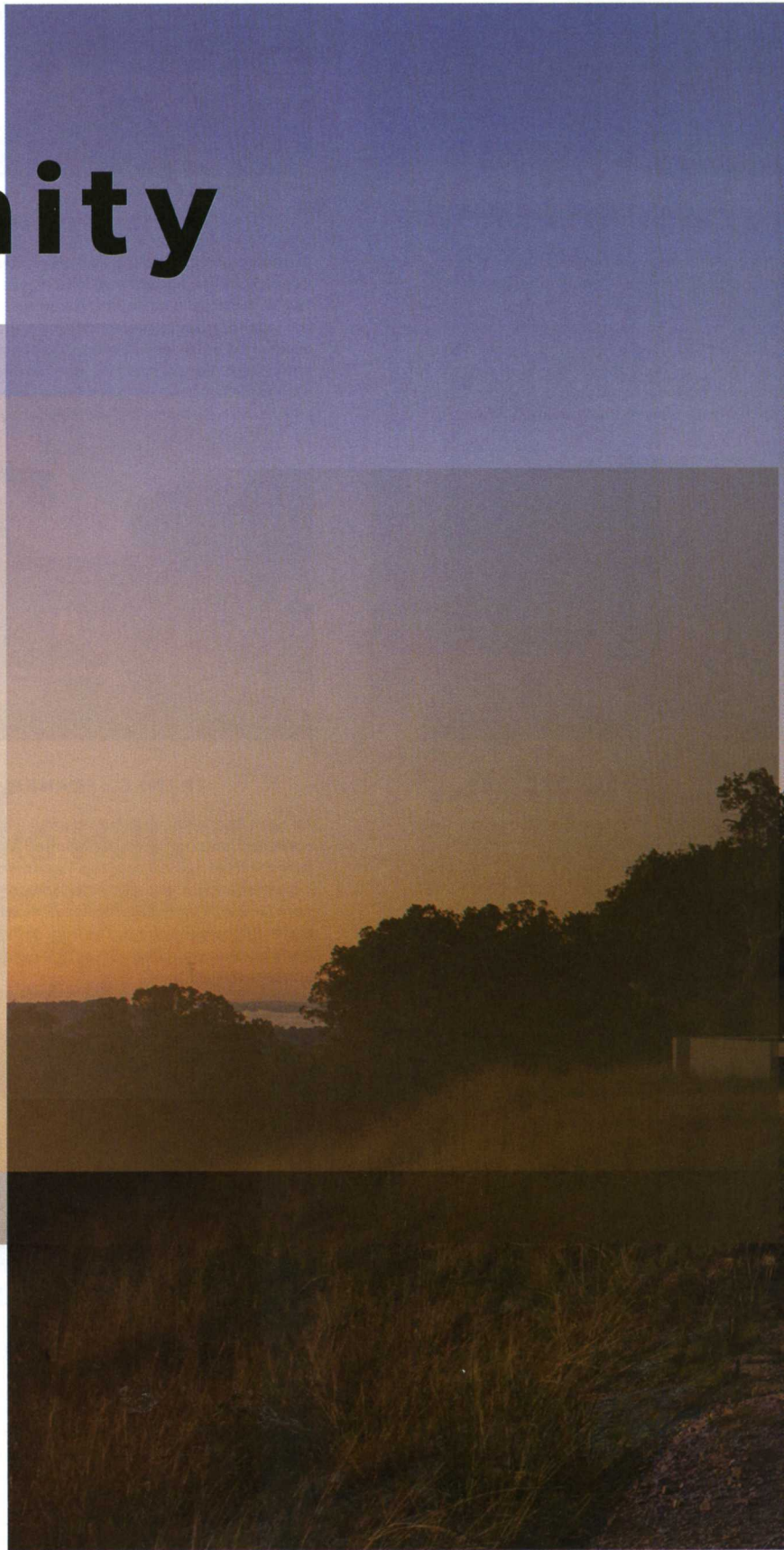


Serenity

A HILLTOP
HOME ALLURES
WITH ITS TRIO
OF CALMING
COURTYARDS

Now





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When Michael Gibertini and Kari Nations bought 50 acres of property near Marble Falls to build a retirement home, they figured they would only get out there from time to time. Little did they know, they'd fall so in love with the house that it would become their permanent home.

The semiretired Austinites, both clinical psychologists by training who work as research scientists, had several requests for the new house: They wanted the property to be net-zero energy (meaning it produces as much energy as it uses); they wanted the house to be hidden (not visible from any road below); and they wanted to preserve every oak tree on the land. Impressed with the work of Austin-based architect Winn Wittman, whose Ravine house they had seen in *Urban Home Magazine*, they commissioned Wittman to design their Hill Country haven.

"I had designed a number of hilltop homes over the years, and most of them are focused outward. And then I had designed some more urban homes that were focused inward. In this case, I wanted to create both inward and outward focus," Wittman says.

The architect and homeowners agreed that the home would have a midcentury modern design. The house's flat roof and continuous gutter on the back of the roof were largely determined by both the need to collect rainwater and also to have a low profile that wouldn't be super visible. When the couple bought the land, it had never had any construction on it, and there was zero infrastructure, aside from a very slow water well. Gibertini led the charge in making the property net zero—or as close to it as possible—adding in a solar array and a 30,000-gallon rainwater tank.

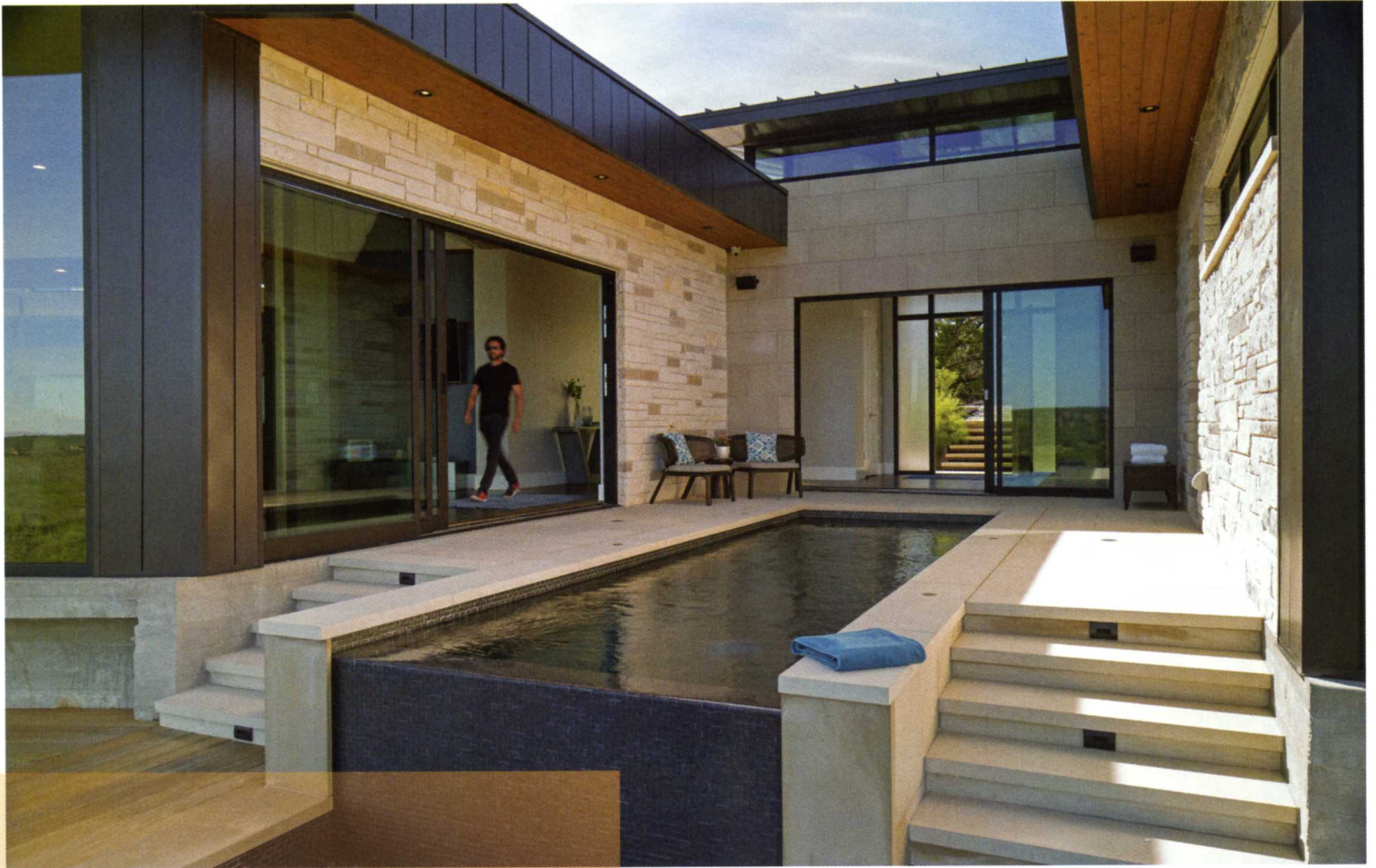
"Originally, I designed it to be net zero from the electricity standpoint, with the idea being we'd be there maybe half the time. Now that we're there full time, it's a little less than that—I think we get about 90 percent of our electricity needs covered, so I'm looking into maybe adding a few panels," Gibertini says.

While conceptualizing the home in the summer of 2015, Wittman rented a place in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico, to beat the heat and





Homeowner Kari Nations designed the interiors of the Hill Country house herself. The main entertaining area features an eye-catching Moooi pendant light above the dining table.



“The second you walk in, it’s like your blood pressure drops 20 points,” Nations says. “It’s just the most serene space.”



This page, from top: the home’s “water” courtyard dazzles with an infinity-edge pool; the master bathroom features an imbuia bench located both inside and outside of the shower. Opposite page, from top: the guest bedroom; Michael Brozgul of Edwood Studio designed a white oak waterfall bar top for the 14-foot kitchen island.



draw design inspiration. He noticed that all the homes there had amazing courtyards, and the house he was staying in also had a small plunge pool. Inspired by the Mexican home, he convinced Gibertini and Nations to let him add courtyards and a plunge pool to the design of their house. “I called it ‘Casa Tre Cortile’—house of three courtyards,” he says of the Hill Country home. “One of them had water, one was a firepit, and one was a garden.”

The architect also took note of the couple’s request for the house to not be flashy or intimidating to the locals.

“What Michael and Kari told me was that they didn’t want their rancher neighbors to feel like they had to take their boots off when they came into the house,” he says.

Located several feet down from a ridgeline, the lengthy 3,500-square-foot, three-bedroom, three-and-a-half bath property built by Zbrank & Holt Custom Homes is basically “one room wide and 200 feet long,” Gibertini says.

“If you’re short on your steps that day, you could just take a couple laps in our house and get up to your 10,000,” Nations adds with a laugh.

Notable features of the home’s interiors, which Nations designed herself, include custom furniture pieces by Michael Brozgul of Edwood Studio, such as a modern walnut platform bed, a white oak waterfall bar top for the 14-foot kitchen island, and a distinctive imbuia bench that offers seating both inside and outside the glass shower. The floors are made from locally harvested and sustainable post oak wood, and the whole house is heated by a contemporary wood-burning stove. Every room in the main house is lined with floor-to-ceiling windows facing east, overlooking the scenic Hill Country.

Of course, the couple spends much of their time outdoors, sitting on their porch watching the view every night alongside their dogs, a Catahoula-shepherd mix and a purebred Catahoula. “We have two big dogs who think they rule the world now that they’re ranch dogs,” Nations says.

The hilltop is bracketed by several large oak trees that the couple preserved during the building process. They enlisted Liz Klein of Design My Yard to do the landscaping of the property, and Klein chose many unusual, drought-resistant native plants for the front “garden” courtyard, such as a blue atlas cedar, to provide diversity in color and bloom timing. Nations also put in a vegetable garden on the west side of the hilltop. The couple is still looking to find the perfect firepit for their small outdoor “fire” courtyard.

To cool off from the Texas heat, they can dip their toes in the 7-by-20-foot infinity-edge plunge pool in the “water” courtyard, located off the living room. The house also has an outdoor shower, which was inspired by a shower they had enjoyed during a trip to Belize. It’s the only curved element in the rectilinear home, Wittman says.

To Gibertini and Nations, the best part of their Hill Country abode is its instant calming effect.

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