

# LABOR *of Love*



By Mauri Elbel Photography by Leonid Furmansky

*When architect Harmony Grogan found a cozy 1936 bungalow tucked in Austin's Zilker neighborhood a decade ago, the only thing she saw was potential.*







Functioning as a rental property for most of its existence, the 1,340-square-foot house was an all-white drywall shell at first glance. But Grogan looked past the mundane to see the beauty in the bungalow’s original details — hardwood floors, trim, windows and doors — and embarked on a room-by-room renovation that preserved the home’s history and infused life and color into each time-worn space.

“We were definitely looking for an old home — a home with character was at the top of our list,” says Grogan, principal architect of Pluck Architecture, the women-led architecture and interiors firm she recently started after 20 years in the industry. “It checked all the boxes for me as an architect: two

bedrooms, two bathrooms, an eat-in kitchen and walk-in closets. It had great old bones, but I felt like we could add so much character to the home and make it more comfortable for us while increasing the functionality.”

For Grogan, this project was all about embracing the concept of small living. She didn’t want to live in a large space nor maintain and pay taxes on rooms that are rarely used. Rather, her goal was to redesign this home so that each room would be used to its maximum ability. Today the updated home Grogan shares with her partner, Jacob Scheick, and their two black labs, Bu (named after French architect Le Corbusier) and Pei (inspired by Chinese-American architect I.M. Pei), is an inspiring testament of how a small home can live much larger than its square footage with smart and thoughtful updates.







But this remodel didn't happen overnight. Over the 10 years since they purchased the home, Grogan and Scheick have done much of the project themselves, living inside the house as it evolved into a home they now take pride in.

"It's been a true labor of love," says Grogan of the home that was recently featured on the 2019 Preservation Austin Homes Tour. "And we did it room by room, which is a really good way of doing things because once you live in a space and see the true patterns and lifestyles unfold, the original concept of what you wanted to change probably isn't the same."

Because they rarely host overnight guests, the first project on the list was converting the second bedroom into a library to house their vast collection of books. Stripping back the drywall revealed a gorgeous honey-colored wood ceiling and exposed shiplap walls that Grogan painted in a matte finish. The architect designed a custom floor-to-ceiling bookcase that brought a mid-century element to the pre-war home with its thin lines and geometry.

"I think when you live small, it's important that you can escape to a different room — the big open floor plan concept isn't always successful in small living," says Grogan. "Having different rooms allows us to break up functions and creates privacy in the home. I was also able to give a different personality to each room, which is fun and interesting — I like how this house unfolds, room by room. There is a procession of spaces now."

Throughout the home's interior, Grogan selected colors from Benjamin Moore®'s Historical Collection, inspired by 18th and 19th architecture found throughout North America. For example, Edgecomb Gray coats the original shiplap walls in the master bedroom that were exposed after the beaten-up drywall was removed, transforming it into a soothing and serene space. For years, original door and window locations were hidden by a layer of drywall so Grogan designed built-in storage nooks to fill those voids and bridge the gap in the original shiplap wall finish. During the demolition, Grogan found tiny scraps of vintage floral wallpaper left over on the walls. As



a nod to the past, she selected an Osborne & Little wallpaper with a similar print and color scheme but with a more modern print featuring giant poppies with silk-like petals. A white-washed beadboard ceiling envelops the room and creates the feeling of a canopy over the bed.

"This room is very peaceful — it's calmer than the other rooms in the house in terms of color and soft daylight," says Grogan of the master bedroom. "It really feels like a retreat."

Throughout the remodel, Grogan made an effort to re-use what she could rather than replace existing components that were in perfect working order, ranging from the original wood and vintage encaustic tile flooring to existing doors and cabinets.

"It was important to me to stay modest and true to the bones of the house," says Grogan. "Nothing is too perfect. I didn't want anything to be trendy. I wanted it to feel vintage but current. A lot of people who come in this house don't know what is new and old, and I take a lot of pride in that. I think it demonstrates that we can adapt these older homes to present day living without having to necessarily gut the space and install sleek finishes."

In the kitchen, existing cabinets were updated with a mint-hued Hancock Green while new countertops, backsplash and lighting breathed life to the dated space. Grogan and Scheick







didn't need a dedicated laundry space so they removed the overcrowded and cumbersome utility closet in the corner of the kitchen and created a more functional area with new appliances placed under the counter which are concealed by cabinetry doors when not in use. Above, a bar alcove offers open shelving for display and storage and features a stainless steel countertop to prepare drinks.

The bungalow's exterior charm was retained by preserving original details and restoring materials, but with a refreshed color palette — blue-gray with bold and colorful pops like chartreuse-yellow doors and peacock window frames. On the back porch, Grogan mounted leftover butcher block from the countertops below the window to create a pass-through from the kitchen, beginning the extension of a spacious outdoor living area that continues into the back yard where pavers run alongside a wall crawling with ivy. The outside, just like the inside of the home, is all about maximizing each space and fitting it to how they live.

"To me, this home is so comfortable and feels true to the character of the original home as well as the way we live today," says Grogan. "It really is tailored to our lifestyle, and I think that is important in architecture. It feels very put together and cohesive, but it is also fun and unexpected." ♦

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