



HOME TOURS

This Blanco River Home Is the Ultimate Haven for a Texas Couple

By Lauren Jones / Photos by Dror Baldinger –
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A tranquil riverside home celebrates the surrounding landscape.

Shelby and Ana Oostwouder loved their Houston home—they called it the "Alice in Wonderland" house due to its whimsical design—but sadly, it was a "money pit." "It was very architecturally imaginative, but everything was falling apart," says Ana. "The owner who bought it after us ended up bulldozing it."

The couple craved a simpler life, and they ultimately decided to move to the quaint college town of San Marcos, 30 minutes outside of Austin, Texas. Here, they discovered an oak-covered, multiacre lot on a steep limestone bluff just 100 feet from the edge of the Blanco River.



The couple, who both have engineering backgrounds, enjoyed sharing their ideas with the architects. The result is their Hill Country dream home.

Photo: Dror Baldinger



The palette of limestone, glass, and steel creates an old-meets-new look.

Photo: Dror Baldinger

"We liked the small nature of San Marcos," Ana says. "It's convenient to go into the metropolitan area and not have to deal with traffic. We just aren't urban people."

After seeing the work of A.Gruppo Architects in a magazine, they decided to hire the firm's principals Andrew Nance and Thad Reeves to build a light-filled home with a strong connection to the outdoors.

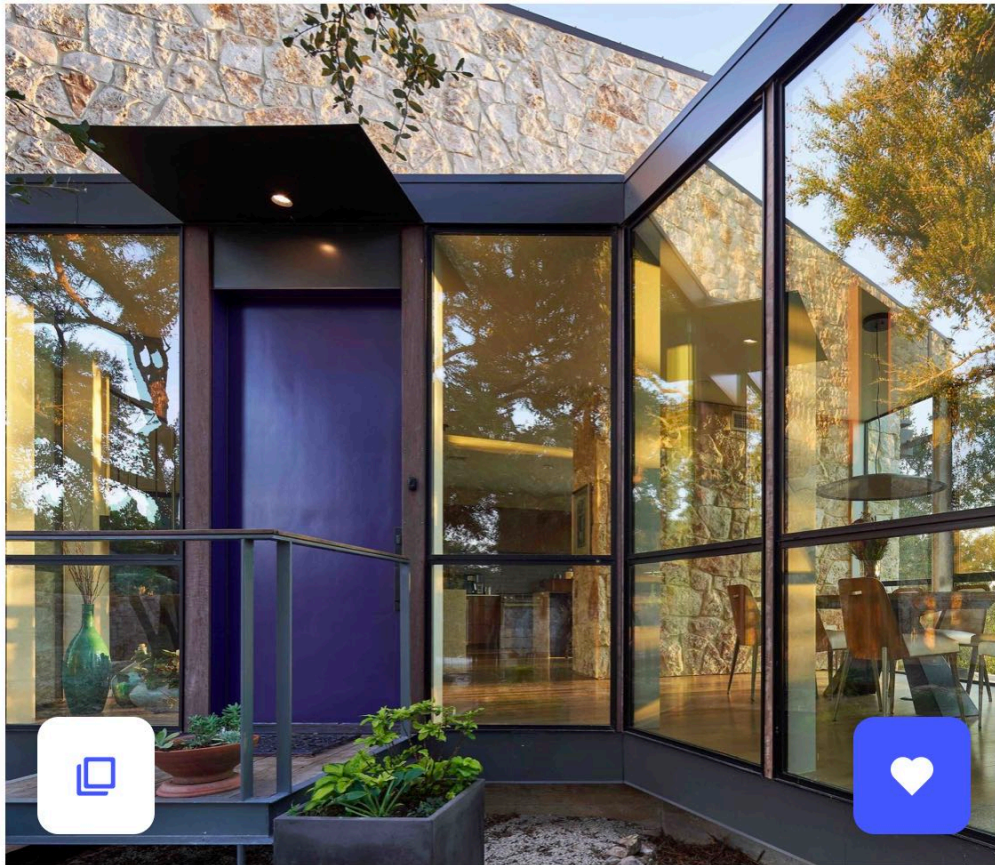


The property, which is a good 10-15 minutes from the center of San Marcos, "is at the end of a dead-end road and has this remote feeling. They really wanted a home that felt connected to nature and a place where they could enjoy the mountain laurels and views," Nance says.

Photo: Dror Baldinger

Nance, who works locally in San Marcos, and Reeves, who works in Dallas, visited the site on a number of occasions to fully grasp the land and share their vision with the couple.

"When you visit the site, one of the first things you notice is the rippling sound of the river," Nance says. "There are a lot of rocks and limestone, mountain laurels that have purple blooms in the spring, and wonderful, majestic oak trees."



The front door is a near-perfect color match to the site's purple mountain laurel blooms.

Photo: Dror Baldinger

The firm drew up a three-volume structure of limestone, steel, glass, and metal, taking care to preserve the root systems of the site's live oaks. The plan also falls in line with the local architectural control committee's ask for a Hill Country-style home.

"While the neighborhood does have the committee, it actually leaves a lot open," Nance says. "We tried to take this idea of 'what is Hill Country' in terms of materiality and identify those things."

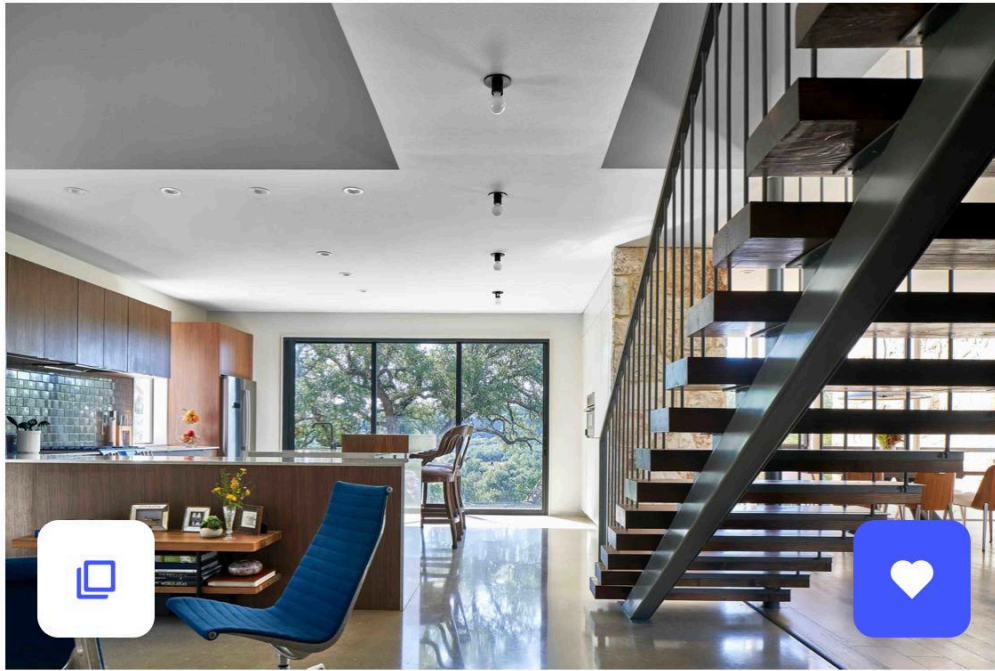


In order to protect an adjacent root system, the architects cantilevered the dining room. This solution allows the "roots to breathe," Nance says.

Photo: Dror Baldinger

The first volume is a two-story structure that includes the kitchen, living room, and other public spaces. The master bedroom, which has a fantastic view of the bluff, is in the middle, leaving the garage and guest house to occupy the third volume.

From the master bedroom, the couple can listen to the tranquil sounds of the river and catch a glimpse of the hawks, cardinals, and other birds that visit their land. "Our friends think we live in a treehouse," Ana Ooustwoder says.



The Oostwouders wanted a home that was low-maintenance yet sophisticated. The interior is filled with materials that match the contemporary Hill Country aesthetic of the exterior.

Photo: Dror Baldinger

The interior has a farmhouse-like feel with low-maintenance polished concrete flooring in the kitchen and engineered oak flooring in the dining room. A "glass knuckle" in the entryway connects the main living spaces.



"The home is angled to capture the winter sun and the summer shade," Ana says.

Photo: Dror Baldinger

While the design of the three-volume structure came naturally, Nance and Reeves pulled off several tricky architectural maneuvers to accommodate the slope of the site.

"There's about a five-foot difference between the garage and the main living space, elevation-wise. The site slopes away pretty quickly, so we tied all of the structures together with ramps," Nance says. "You could ride the garage ramp up to the master, while another ramp takes you to the dining area."



"The home has a very organic design," Ana says. "It's almost like a Frank Lloyd Wright where everything just melts into the background."

Photo: Dror Baldinger

The slope is barely noticeable, and the ramps will make the home more livable as the couple age. The architects also incorporated a range of green building strategies—the home is able to "capture water in cisterns so it's not connected to a public water system or a water well," Reeves says.

For the couple, who have two grown children and plenty of friends that visit, the home is the perfect getaway—one where they can enjoy the changing seasons and wildlife and make memories for years to come.

Project Credits:

*Architect of Record: A.Gruppo Architects /
@a_gruppo_architects*

*Builder/General Contractor: A.Gruppo
Architects*

Structural Engineer: Calvetti & Associates

Interior Designer: A.Gruppo Architects

*Cabinetry Design/Installation: Dupont
Cabinetry and Design*
