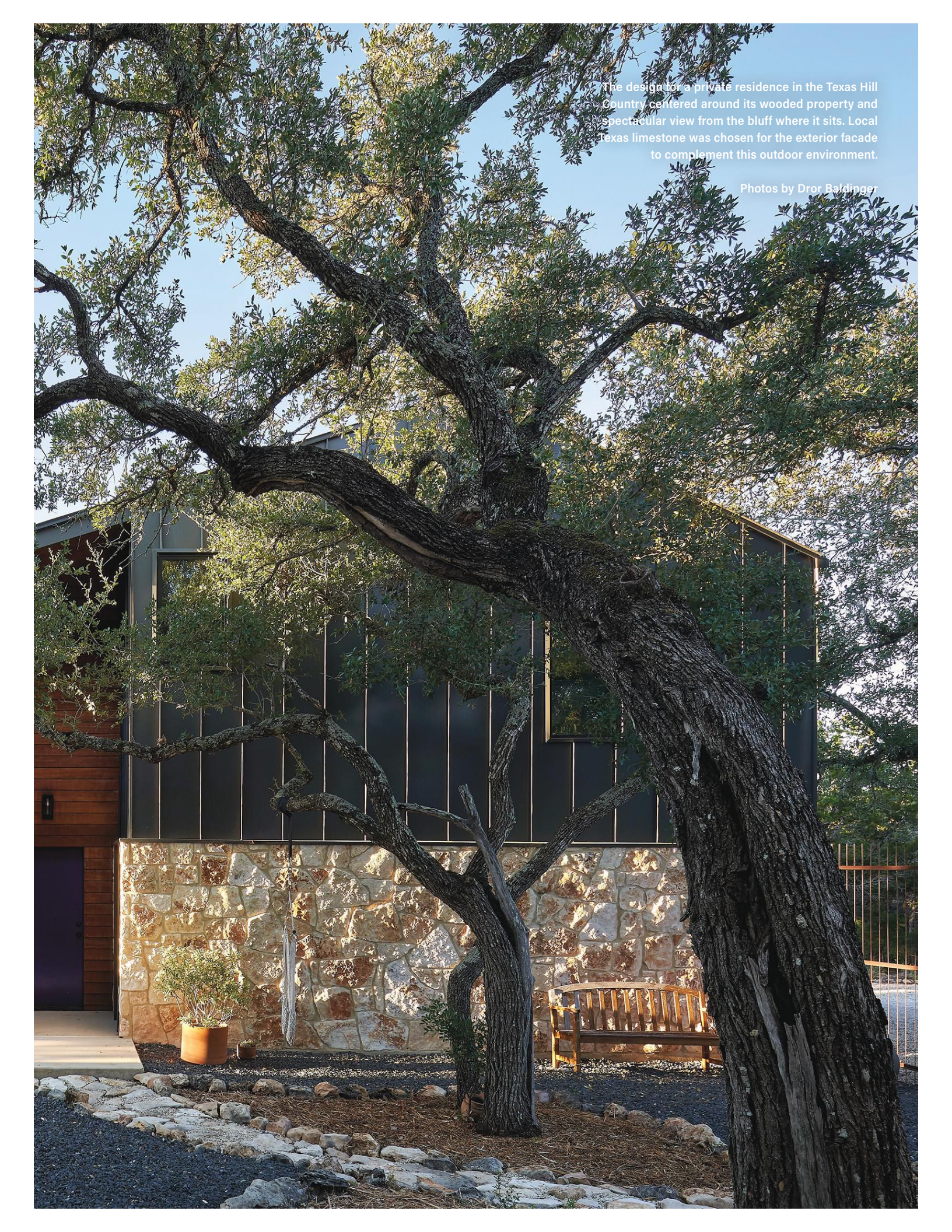


A photograph of a modern house with a stone wall and a wooden deck, surrounded by trees. The house features a large, light-colored stone wall on the left and a dark wooden deck with a metal railing on the right. The background is filled with lush green trees and a clear blue sky. The title 'Referencing local history' is overlaid in large white text.

Referencing local history

From its perch overlooking the limestone bed of the Blanco River, a Texas dwelling combines Old World style with modern technology as a homage to past skilled artisans in the region

by Jennifer Richinelli



The design for a private residence in the Texas Hill Country centered around its wooded property and spectacular view from the bluff where it sits. Local Texas limestone was chosen for the exterior facade to complement this outdoor environment.

Photos by Dror Baldinger



The chosen stone is "Country Blend" limestone, which was quarried by Cobra Stone based in Florence, TX.

Designed by A.GRUPPO Architects of San Marcos, TX, a 3,300-square-foot private residence seated on a bluff 100 feet above the Blanco River in the Hill Country of Austin, TX, offers its occupants incredible views to the southwest. Pulling from its natural habitat, the residence is built of local Texas limestone and takes full advantage of surrounding trees to create an inspiring and serene living space.

"The design goal for the residence was really to respond to a few very unique elements of this particular place," said architect Andrew Nance. "The river is fairly shallow in this area, so you can hear the water rippling over the limestone bottom. After the [home-owners] pointed this out, we wanted to situate the house in a way that they could hear the river flowing from their bedroom — perfect for

a Sunday afternoon nap. The second feature was a wondrous grove of oak trees. The thing about a grove of oaks is that they kind of define a 'place.' So we thought we would reinforce that place by situating the structures around the oaks to create a courtyard."

From the start of the design phase, it was known that an abundance of natural stone would be utilized to realize the home's aesthetic. "There is a long history of vernacular stone buildings in the Hill Country," explained Nance. "Over a century ago, German and Czech settlers moved into this area and brought their experience with masonry along with them. It has left an indelible mark on vernacular buildings in this area. We wanted to reference this history with stone.

"One key difference with traditional masonry and contemporary masonry is that now we

A look of rustic charm was achieved
with the home's limestone exterior



"We were really drawn to it for its various shapes and forms, and roughly smooth appearance," said architect Andrew Nance of A.GRUPPO Architects, San Marcos, TX.





There are three main components to the residence: the “living house,” master suite and garage.

build with the stone as a veneer, rather than solid walls,” the architect went on to say. “So as not to create a false sense of history, we chose to detail the stone in a few key places to illustrate that it is a veneer. [Therefore], at once, the assemblage of three buildings, the ‘living house,’ the master suite and the garage are almost seen as ruins of old barns and buildings that have always been here. Yet upon closer inspection, you can see the stone is cantilevered from the slab, revealing that it is a skin, rather than structure. The continuity of the stone surface is

also interrupted by the downspouts which are recessed in the thickness of the stone veneer.”

Cobra Stone, based in Florence, TX, supplied its “Country Blend” of limestone for the residential project. The diverse hues and irregular pattern of each piece creates a charming rustic characteristic for the home.

“We were really drawn to it for its various shapes and forms, and roughly smooth appearance,” said Nance. “This stone also most directly represents the types, shapes and sizes of stone you find laying on the ground around



"The second feature was a wondrous grove of oak trees," said the architect. "The thing about a grove of oaks is that they kind of define a 'place.' So we thought we would reinforce that place by situating the structures around the oaks to create a courtyard." (above) According to Nance, the skilled mason assembled the limestone wall like a puzzle of pieces that he would subtly shape to fit. (below)





The use of limestone was carried into the interior design with a wall that can be seen on both sides of the glass window – merging a contemporary vibe with Old World charm.

the property, so we felt it was an honest representation of the place. This type of stone provided a wonderful counterpoint to the rectilinear steel and glass of the dining room and overall forms of the buildings.”

The design team presented the homeowners with several stone options before a final decision was made. “It was a function of pattern and color,” said Nance. “In the end, the clients agreed that the stones which most closely represented those found on site were the best fit for the project.”

The limestone was installed by a team from Mando’s Masonry in Kyle, TX. On average, the pieces varied in size, with the smallest being about 8 x 12 to 16 x 20 inches.

“It was such a pleasure to watch the stone-masons at work,” said the architect. “The entire house was done by a two-man crew.

One was charged with mixing mortar and delivering stones — typically a half dozen or so at a time — while the mason assembled the wall like a puzzle of pieces that he would subtly shape to fit. It is always a pleasure to watch an artist at work.”

The natural stone carries inside – creating a smooth transition between the outdoor and interior living spaces. To reinforce the reading of the building massing, the stone surface continues from outside to inside where the dining room meets the master suite and the living house. The entire project was completed in 13 months. **SW**

PRIVATE RESIDENCE AUSTIN, TX

Architect: A.GRUPPO Architects, San Marcos, TX
Stone Supplier: Cobra Stone, Florence, TX
Stone Mason: Mando’s Masonry, Kyle, TX