



Lueders limestone was the material of choice for a newly constructed residence in the hillside of Austin, TX, to complement the surrounding natural environment.

Photos by Jake Holt

Forming a kinship with the land

Optimizing on its location, the homeowners of an Austin, TX, residence chose regional limestone for the residential design – tying it to the hilly countryside and harmonizing with its natural surroundings

by Jennifer Richinelli

What better setting for a home furnished lavishly in natural stone than one that sits in the hillside among numerous trees and other lush landscape? According to Heather McKinney, FAIA, LEED AP BD+C, RID, principal of McKinney York Architects in Austin, TX, her clients sought to take advantage of the property's natural habitat, and locally quarried limestone was a desirable choice of material for the residence's exterior, as well as various interior applications.

"In Austin, we love to use native limestone, especially in hilly conditions where it blends well into the landscape," said McKinney, who worked alongside of Project Architect Brian Carlson, AIA, and Project Manager Andrew Green, AIA. "Our clients also associate the limestone with Austin and were very particular in the selection of the blend, the cut and the sizes of the stone."

The design objective was not only to provide a beautiful home for newly retired professionals, but it was also critical for the residential design to meet their needs and requirements. "The two important elements of our concept-driven design was to position the new house in the sloping landscape to capture low views of the city and fully take advantage of the tree-filled property and to provide a fitting setting for their collection of objects and art," explained the architect.



FINDING THE RIGHT MATCH

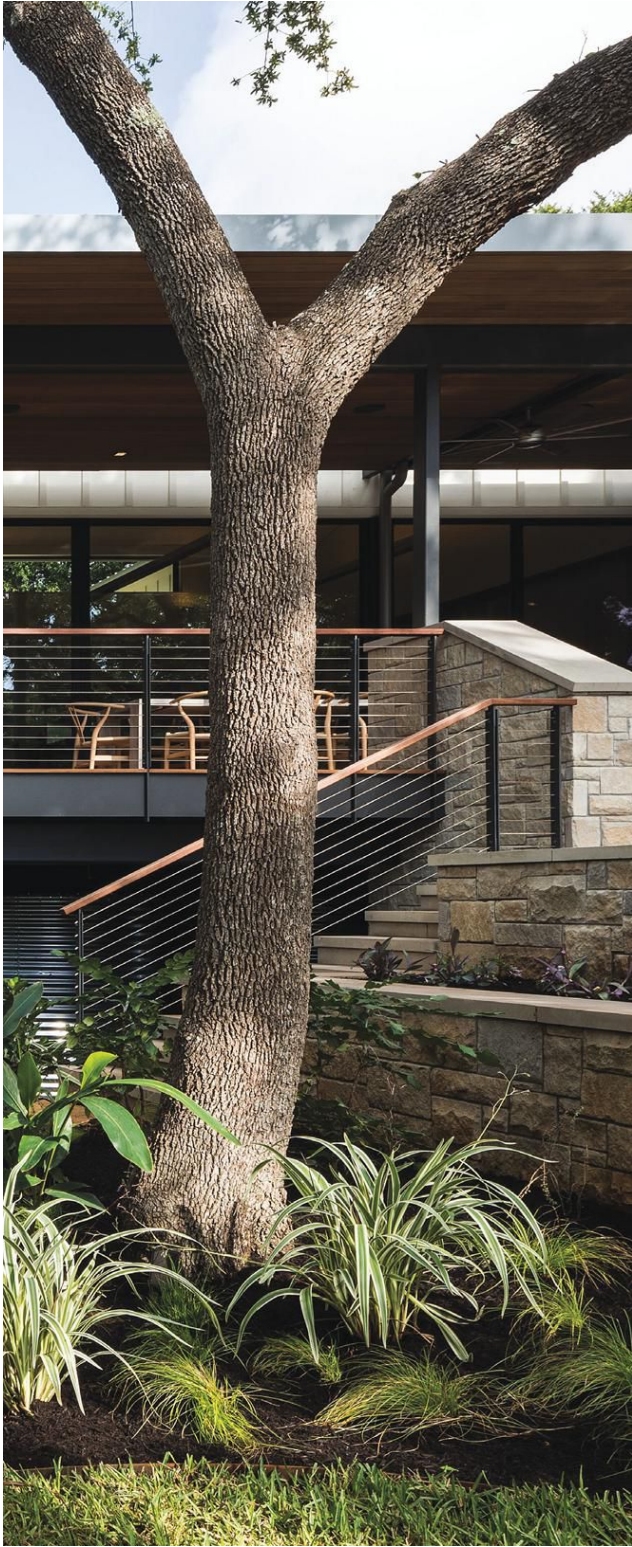
After careful consideration, a slightly variegated gray and buff Lueders limestone blend was chosen for the home's design. McKinney explained that the limestone, which was supplied and installed by Llewellyn Masonry, contains random ashlar roughly square edges with some

irregularity, and the pieces were approximately $3\frac{5}{8}$ inches thick. The color and appearance was matched to an image that McKinney and the homeowners provided to the stone supplier.

"This blend is light in tone, but earthy in feel — ranging from soft grays to sandy buff colors," said McKinney, adding that

the larger stones measure 24 inches. "The joints were no wider than $\frac{3}{8}$ inches, with the mortar raked back a little to give a tight, almost dry stack, appearance."

Llewellyn Masonry presented a mock-up of the stonework prior to its installation for the architects and homeowners to review. "Our client was very engaged and drove



Among the design objectives was to position the new house in the sloping landscape to capture low views of the city and fully take advantage of the tree-filled property.

The Lueders limestone, which also was used for the outdoor fireplace surrounds, contains random ashlar roughly square edges with some irregularity.



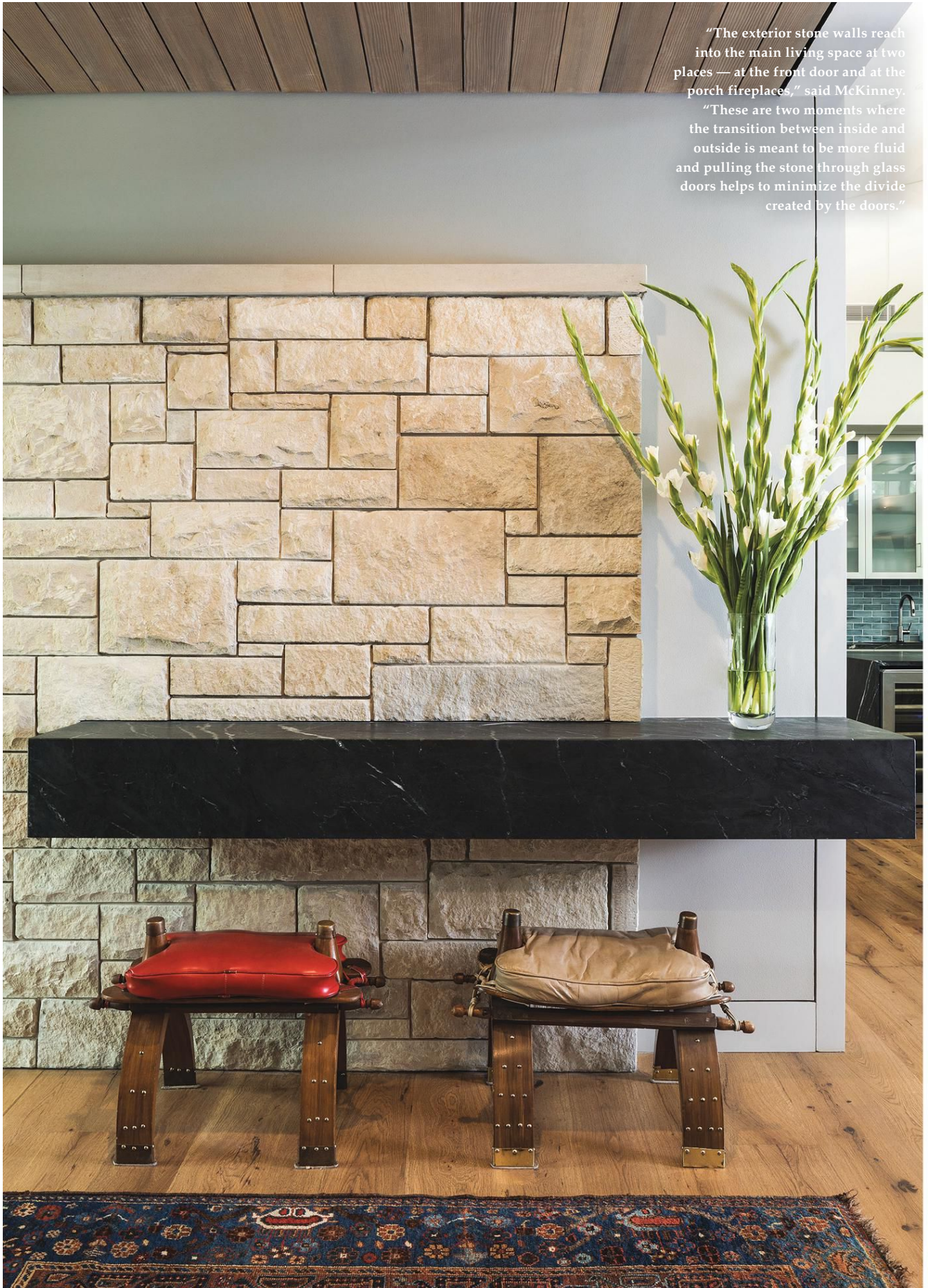
A slightly variegated gray and buff Lueders limestone blend was chosen for the home's design.



"At the back of the house, the pool patio is a critical piece which anchors the house to the sloping site," explained Heather McKinney, FAIA, LEED AP BD+C, RID, principal of McKinney York Architects in Austin. "We used the pool patio to reinforce our goal of connecting the house to the landscape."



"The exterior stone walls reach into the main living space at two places — at the front door and at the porch fireplaces," said McKinney. "These are two moments where the transition between inside and outside is meant to be more fluid and pulling the stone through glass doors helps to minimize the divide created by the doors."





Pulling the limestone into the interior design adds a warm touch to the contemporary living space.

from Houston on a regular basis throughout the construction process to attend site meetings and approve materials,” said McKinney. “A variety of patterns were reviewed and approved via photograph prior to construction, but it’s nearly impossible to get a good understanding of colors from a photograph. The mock-up was particularly helpful in identifying the specific colors and the quantity of each color to be used in the blend for this home.”

The warm shades of the limestone, and its rough-cut texture, create a strong presence for the 4,233-square-foot home, which is nestled within its natural habitat. The limestone was used extensively for the exte-

rior facade, as well steps, retaining walls and the pool patio.

“At the back of the house, the pool patio is a critical piece which anchors the house to the sloping site,” explained McKinney. “We used the pool patio to reinforce our goal of connecting the house to the landscape. The retaining walls around the pool match the residence, but a single color from the blend was selected for the cut stone pavers. They are about 30 inches in dimension.

TRANSITIONING INSIDE

“The exterior stone walls reach into the main living space at two places — at the front door and at the porch fireplaces,” the

architect went on to say. “These are two moments where the transition between inside and outside is meant to be more fluid and pulling the stone through the glass doors helps to minimize the divide created by the doors.”

When it came to designing the kitchen, the homeowners desired a space where family and friends could gather. “We wanted to have a very open kitchen — using upper and full-height cabinetry only at the perimeters,” said the architect. “The unusual double islands provide great opportunities for zoning different activities within the space and allow the clients, both good cooks, to socialize with their guests. We had



In the kitchen, Indian Noire soapstone slabs for the countertops were paired with a Tozen glass backsplash from Lunada Bay Tile.

always been drawn to the option of using a soft gray soapstone for the counters as it tied into the earthy neutral color palette which worked well with the textiles and artisan objects in the clients' collections. However, when we went to look at soapstone with them, we all fell in love with these white and gray Indian Noire soapstone slabs. To offset the dramatic sweep of the soapstone, the client selected a diminutive Tozen glass backsplash from Lunada Bay Tile."

The large kitchen islands feature a dramatic waterfall edge. "There is a lot of movement in the soapstone, which we felt was accentuated by turning the stone vertically and book-matching it," said McKinney. "Carefully planning the pieces so that the dramatic white veins align and flow over the corners makes the whole island feel more monolithic — as if it's one giant block of stone that was hollowed out to slide cabi-

nets into. The same technique is repeated in the floating stone hearth at the double fireplaces and the entry room ledge."

McKinney went on to say that while the kitchen measures 350 square feet to the outside of the second island, the space is open to the living area where people can congregate at the island and around the cantilevered breakfast table. "If you created a wall to contain this social space, you would need to add another 100 square feet to the kitchen," she said. "Let's face it, the kitchen is the hub of the house, so it is important to understand how open or contained it needs to be. In this kitchen, we wanted to downplay the 'kitchen' character and make it feel more like a social space. It is also important to understand how the client(s) are going to occupy the space and how much room they need for circulating easily. Functional storage and counter 'real estate' needs to be

assessed, and then we try to find the optimum layout which flows beautifully and is comfortable for each unique client."

When reflecting on the project upon completion, McKinney is pleased with the outcome. "The stonework was constructed very precisely, but overall, achieved a very soft and welcoming appearance," she said. "We credit the craftsmanship of Llewellyn Masonry for the superior results." □

Private Residence Austin, TX

Architect: McKinney York Architects,
Austin, TX

General Contractor: Arrowhead
Construction, Austin, TX

Stone Supplier/Mason: Llewellyn
Masonry, Austin, TX (Lueders
limestone)