





Book Smart

THIS BALCONES HOME
FEATURES AN EPIC
LIBRARY AND SECLUDED
ART STUDIO

For

Rick and Ginger Geyer, their recently completed Central Texas home is more than just a work of contemporary architecture. To the couple, the dwelling represents the next chapter in their lives.

The Geysers came to Austin from Dallas in 1988 when their children were just 1 and 3 years old, moving into a two-story, 3,800-square-foot 1960s home in the Balcones neighborhood. It was only one of two homes the fans of modern architecture could find with a style that truly appealed to them. Now, more than 30 years later, the empty nesters felt it was time to downsize and rethink their current floorplan. Thus, they reached out to architects Jennifer Vrazel and Robert Steinbomer of Studio Steinbomer.

“They had a budget, and ultimately the contractor came back and said we could build a new house for what we would spend on renovations,” Vrazel says. The land had a couple of easements that made sighting tricky, and the home was also in disrepair with a cracked foundation, something that would be extremely expensive to fix.

The couple considered selling the home, but in the end agreed that a new build would be the best decision. After creating so many memories in the neighborhood, they were hesitant to move.

“We are very fond of the site,” Rick says. “If we moved, we didn’t know where we’d find a piece of land as nice, so it didn’t really make sense.”

Over the years, they had also researched the history of the home and felt a connection to its past. For instance, they found out that *New York Times*-bestselling author Susan Wittig Albert, who had worked at Texas State, once lived there. “She made the cement fish ponds out back,” Ginger recalls. “When we first moved in, we filled them in since our kids were little and turned them into planters.” They also discovered that a UT student who had been killed during the tragic 1966 tower shooting once resided there.

After the decision to start fresh was made, the couple began working with Studio Steinbomer and RisherMartin Fine Homes to make their new home a reality, asking for a slightly smaller one-story floorplan with plenty of flexible entertaining space, views of the nearby forest, and a larger art studio with ample ventilation. Although the couple is semi-retired, Ginger is a porcelain sculptor and part-time museum consultant, while Rick provides strategic fundraising consulting for nonprofits including AIA Austin and the Austin Foundation for Architecture.

When it came to the look, the couple came through with a handful of inspiration images, all of Scandinavian-style homes with clean, simple exteriors. But achieving this “Nordic farmhouse” aesthetic would be expensive.

“We had to find a happy medium,” Vrazel says. “Having no visible joinery takes a lot of effort and construction time.” Ultimately, the exterior

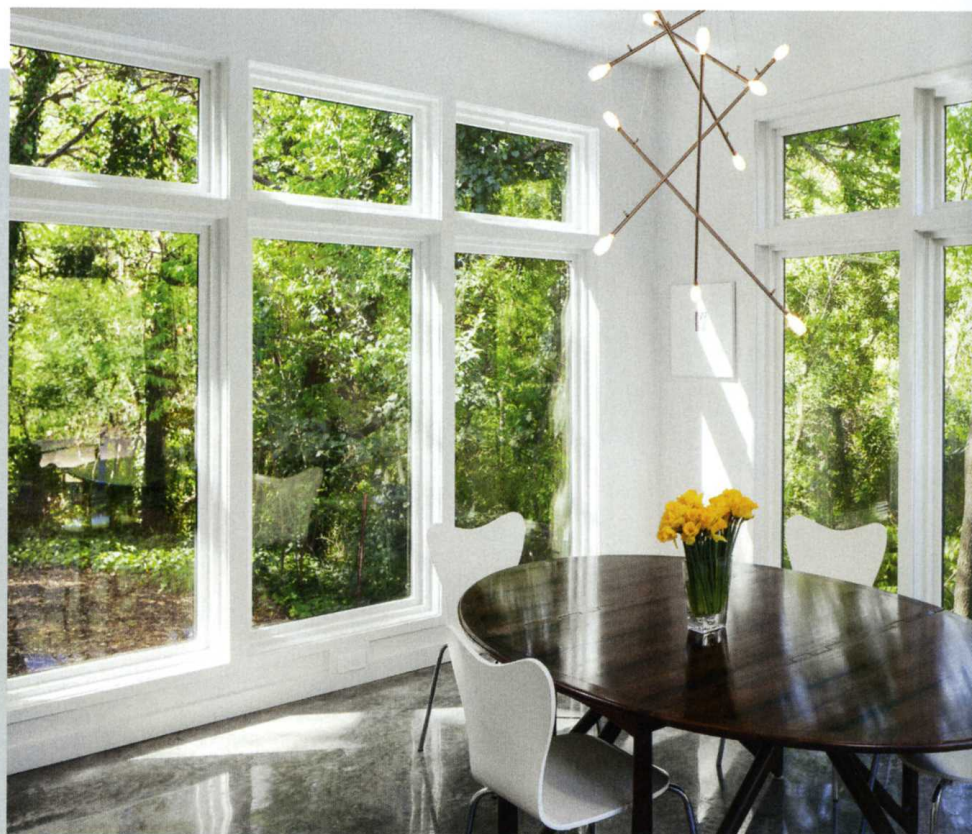


The couple wanted a floorplan with plenty of entertaining space, views of the nearby forest, and a larger art studio with ample ventilation.



From top: The exterior of the one-story home; Rick conceptualized an 8-by-8-by-2-foot moveable wall that would close off the small office space and open up the living room for parties as needed.

Similar to the outside of the house, they wanted the same clean, cost-conscious finish inside with little things that would have a meaningful impact.





This page, clockwise from top left: The dining room has large windows with views of the verdant outdoors; the home has a 90-foot-long library that the owners call “the book spine”; the kitchen features a cobalt blue backsplash.



would consist of painted HardiePlank board, a rot-resistant and durable man-made material, a flat metal roof, Anderson 100 windows, and a red front door.

Similar to the outside of the house, they wanted the same clean, cost-conscious finish inside with little things that would have a meaningful impact. All of the floors are concrete, except in the master shower, and the couple made judicious selections, choosing to spend more money in certain areas like on the “gorgeous cobalt blue backsplash in the kitchen,” Vrazel says, “It makes the most interesting pop of color and a surprise when you turn the corner.”

Other examples include a 90-foot-long library that they lovingly call “the book spine,” which was a clever way to give the couple storage and take advantage of the home’s long hallways. In the living room, Rick, who has a fascination with architecture, conceptualized an 8-by-8-by-2-foot moveable wall, inspired by the years Ginger spent working at Fort Worth’s Kimbell Art Museum and the Dallas Museum of Art, that would close off the small office space and open up the living room for parties as needed.

“He didn’t need a dedicated full-time office, so he created this wall that could be moved out of the way and worked directly with the builder,” Vrazel says.

The couple also did all of the interior design themselves, pulling in pieces they found over the years like the \$49 tiered midcentury table Ginger spotted at Goodwill and a Scandinavian drop-leaf dining room table. In the bedrooms and bathrooms, the couple kept things simple with a focus on maximizing the square footage and getting as much storage as possible. In the master bedroom closet, for example, they worked one on one with the design team to make sure that every inch served a purpose.

The final part of the brief was building a larger, light-filled studio and kiln area. “Because of the nature of what Ginger does, it tends to generate a lot of dust, so we wanted to seal the room off as best as possible,” Vrazel says. They added exhaust fans, a designated mini split air conditioning system, and lined the walls with a waterproofing material.

The new build achieves a stunning modern aesthetic thanks to smart architectural choices, skilled builders, and the willingness of the Geyers to think outside the box for the next phase of their life. “Everything just works,” Rick says. ♣