

ISLAND TIME

A cheerful tropical hut in Balcones Woods evokes a sense of much-needed escapism

By Lauren Jones



You can't help but smile when you walk into Caroline Roe's backyard Tiki bar. The accessory dwelling unit, which was designed by Jennifer Vrazel, Ben Pruett, and Robert Steinbomer of Studio Steinbomer, seamlessly blends with the 1975-built main house thanks to its navy and limestone facade and board-and-batten siding. But inside, that's where the real magic begins.

Thousands of artifacts line the walls, ceiling, and floor space, including a 12-foot-tall Easter Island head Roe purchased from popular Tiki franchise Trader Vic's, a handmade resin bar filled with approximately

150 broken Tiki mugs, authentic blowfish light fixtures, spruced-up Salvation Army seating, and even an Elvis-themed bathroom.

"I was first exposed to [Tiki culture] in college," Roe says. "There was this amazing place in Columbus, Ohio—Kahiki—that I would go to often." Over the last two decades, she and her late husband have been growing an impressive collection, and at this point, she has enacted a one-in, one-out policy for the decor. "When you walk in, your jaw drops because everything has been curated and collected and put in a place for a reason," Vrazel says.

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Clockwise from left: The Tiki theme is reflected throughout the main house as well, including a breakfast area with an extensive mug collection backdrop; the exterior of the Tiki bar; an Elvis-themed backdrop; the exterior of the Tiki bar; an Elvis-themed powder room was a must-have for the owner.



After first connecting with the architect in 2011 with the goal of living in Lockhart, the couple ultimately found a home in Austin, as it was a more convenient commute to work, and decided to make their Tiki dreams a reality. Vrazel and her team designed the shell, which is screened from the street view due to HOA constraints, and Roe did all of the interiors herself, working with artisans on the particular finish-outs. At 596 square feet, with a 22-foot ceiling at its peak, the A-frame structure in the Balcones Woods neighborhood is quite the place to party, and Roe is well-known for her over-the-top holiday affairs.

While Tiki restaurants and bars are associated with spirited cocktails, island music, and maximalist design, Roe enjoys the style for its sense of escapism. "It blocks out the rest of the world," she says. "During hard times or during the winter, you can go down into a Tiki bar and leave it all behind."

And while Roe is drawn to the levity of the style, there's another deeper element that also appeals to her: its philanthropic side. Roe is a member of the Fraternal Order of Moai, a national Tiki social club founded in 2005, which gives back to the Easter Island Foundation in its effort to protect the fragile cultural heritage of Easter Island and surrounding Polynesian Islands. Her and the other members' love of the style helps fund scholarships for children at Toki Rapa Nui School of Music and the Arts, the most secluded music school on the planet. We'll raise an umbrella-lined glass to that. 🍹