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By AUTUMN KRAUSE  
Photography by ANDREA CALO

# An Austin Landscape

A TALENTED ARCHITECT CREATES A DREAM  
GARDEN—DESPITE THE CHALLENGES OF A PROTECTED  
CEDAR ELM SITTING IN THE BACKYARD.



SOMETIMES, A LOCATION HAS YOUR HEART. DESPITE THE CHALLENGES OF DESIGNING AROUND PROTECTED TREES, JED DUHON KNEW THE PROPERTY'S LOCATION WAS IDEAL FOR HIS FAMILY. "WE MULLED OVER THE PROPERTY LOCATION, AND WE REALIZED THAT SECTION OF THE ALLANDALE NEIGHBORHOOD HAD DIRECT ACCESS TO MANY RESTAURANTS, GROCERY STORES, ICE CREAM SHOPS AND THE PUBLIC LIBRARY—ALL WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE," HE SAYS. THOSE ASPECTS ALLOWED THE FINAL PIECE TO FALL INTO PLACE: TAKING THE PLUNGE AND PURCHASING THE PROPERTY.







(ABOVE, LEFT) IN ADDITION TO THE CHALLENGES, DUHON STUDIED THE SUN ORIENTATION, VIEWS AND WIND, ALL WITH EXPLORING IDEAL SPACES FOR BEING OUTSIDE AND PROTECTING THE INTERIORS FROM DIRECT SUNLIGHT. "THE TEXAS SUN IS BRUTAL, AND ARCHITECTS ARE ALWAYS DESIGNING TO PROTECT HOUSES FROM DIRECT SUNLIGHT AND HEAT GAIN—BUT ALSO ALLOWING AS MUCH NATURAL LIGHT AS POSSIBLE."

(ABOVE, RIGHT) ONE OF THE MAIN PRINCIPLES OF MID-CENTURY MODERN DESIGN IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NATURE AND THE GREAT OUTDOORS. "AS TECHNOLOGY HAS ADVANCED OVER THE YEARS, ARCHITECTS HAVE DEVELOPED BUILDING METHODS THAT KEEP OCCUPANTS COMFORTABLE, HEALTHY AND WITH GOOD CONNECTIONS TO OUTDOOR LIGHT AND NATURE," DUHON POINTS OUT. "I INCORPORATED THIS PHILOSOPHY THROUGHOUT THE DESIGN."



After creating countless homes for clients, the time came for Jed Duhon, architect and principal of Studio Steinbomer, to design one for himself and his family. The Austin, Texas, resident had several goals in mind while searching for the right property.

"The first priority was finding a relatively flat lot that allowed for an easy connection between entertainment areas of the kitchen and living in the outdoor spaces," Duhon explains. "Second was finding a pedestrian-friendly neighborhood for the kids to ride bikes and for us to walk to nearby restaurants."

A property on Bull Creek Road spoke to him and his husband, Michael Troy Harper. However, while it was situated in a wonderful spot for an active family, it wasn't a flat lot. In fact, it was very much occupied by a 1940s house—and, on top of that, it had protected cedar elms in the rear yard, with one in a particularly dominant place. This meant that not only would the first home have to be removed (the couple ended up donating it!), the design of the home and gardens would also have to work around the majestic squatter.



TWENTY-TWO-FOOT-HIGH CEILINGS ARE USED TO THEIR FULL POTENTIAL HERE. AS A RESULT OF THE SPACE THEY CREATE, THE STAIRCASE IS ABLE TO DRAMATICALLY DESCEND INTO THE ROOM, AND THERE'S ROOM FOR A 10-FOOT CHANDELIER. IN ADDITION, "THEY PROVIDE GREAT ACOUSTICS AND CREATE A PLAYFUL LIGHT THROUGH THE BRICK DETAILING," DUHON SAYS.











(ABOVE) TRUE TO MID CENTURY MODERN DESIGN, CONTINUITY BETWEEN INTERIOR AND EXTERIOR SPACES WAS A PRIMARY GOAL. IT WAS ACHIEVED THROUGH THE CONNECTION OF INDOOR LIVING AREAS TO COVERED PORCHES FOR OUTDOOR LIVING AND EXTENDING TO THE ADJACENT CABANA AND POOL AREAS. THE DESIGN CONCEPT IN THE LIVING ROOM WAS INSPIRED BY EICHLER HOMES: "I WANTED TO HAVE A SLOPED CEILING WITH EXPOSED BEAMS, A WOODBURNING FIRE PLACE, LOTS OF NATURAL LIGHT AND SLIDING DOORS HAVING ACCESS TO THE OUTDOORS," DUHON SAYS. "I USED CLASSIC MATERIALS OF BRICK AND WOOD TO CREATE A WARM, INVITING SPACE, ALONG WITH FURNISHINGS THAT MADE IT FEEL LIKE HOME."

(OPPOSITE) DUHON CAREFULLY SELECTED EXTERIOR MATERIALS THAT WERE DURABLE AND MAINTENANCE FREE AND THAT COMPLIED WITH THE LATEST BUILDING TECHNOLOGY PRACTICES. HOWEVER, HE ALSO INCORPORATED AESTHETICS OF MID-CENTURY DESIGN. "BOTH THE BRICK AND STUCCO ARE QUINTESSENTIAL MID-MOD MATERIALS THAT ARE TIMELESS," HE SHARES.

In spite of these obstacles, with Duhon's design expertise and creative vision, a plan was drafted. The result comprises a striking series of outdoor spaces that align with the Mid Century Modern ideals of integrated living.

### "RE-MODERN" DESIGN

Mid-Century Modern design has always resonated with Duhon, particularly because of its often-misleading appearance of effortlessness.

"Being an architect, I have the understanding of all the challenges involved with detailing a design that appears to have such simplicity," he points out. "I know the reality and complication behind the construction."

He was introduced to the style while studying architecture in college and was drawn to the greats that mastered the use of materials—such as icons Tadao Ando, Carlo Scarpa, Richard Neutra and Louis Kahn.

"They mastered modern architecture using traditional materials such as concrete, wood, brick, etc.," Duhon says.





FUNCTIONALLY, THE KITCHEN IS DESIGNED TO ENTERTAIN. THE INTENTION IS TO HAVE THE PERSON COOKING ON ONE SIDE OF THE ISLAND AND GUESTS GATHERING AROUND THE ISLAND WITHOUT INTERFERING WITH FOOD PREP.



With these inspirations in mind, he crafted a design that he describes as “re-modern” for his family’s home and gardens. “It combines hints of older Mid Century Modern and more-current modern designs,” he explains.

Initially, the couple loved the property when they first viewed it, but Duhon was uncertain about the constraints of designing around the prominent cedar elm. So, they kept searching.

**The rear landscaping can be seen as soon as you walk through the front door; the intention is to draw and invite guests to participate in the entire property and outdoor living spaces**

“But about four weeks later, our realtor called and said the property had an offer and that we had about an hour to make a counteroffer,” he says. “I called my husband and said we love the neighborhood, and I felt confident I could figure out how to creatively design around the cedar elm.”

One split-second decision later, they made an offer on the property, and it was accepted.

Duhon immediately started planning the house. He actually started with the outdoor spaces and then placed the primary indoor spaces around the tree, positioning the living, kitchen and dining rooms, office and primary bedroom with access and views to the center tree. This created a type of courtyard and an extension of open space from the front door to the rear property line, making it even more unusually experiential than if the tree hadn’t been there at all.





## PROPERTY PRECISION

The rear landscaping can be seen as soon as you walk through the front door; the intention is to draw and invite guests to participate in the entire property and outdoor living spaces. The planting areas define the spaces and merge with the exterior, creating the contrast between the hard lines of the building and the softness of the plantings.

There are a few different outdoor areas that allow for the gardens to be experienced in a range of ways. A covered outdoor kitchen/dining area has a table and chairs, but it also features recessed patio heaters for cooler weather and is purposely placed on the south side for protection from winter winds.

The pool deck is outfitted with a sofa and chairs and gets early-evening shade. "It's a great place for evening cocktails by the pool," Duhon shares.

Finally, a pool "cabana" provides a covered area for sitting by the pool during the day while also functioning as a greenhouse during the winter. It features folding glass doors to shelter the plants.

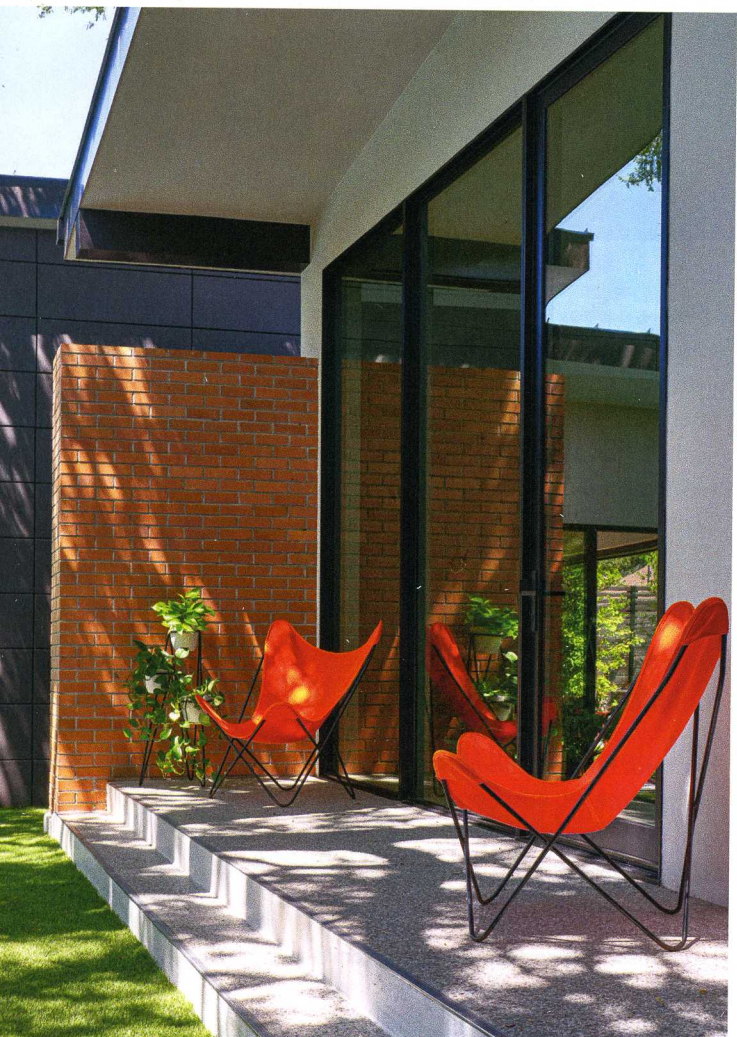
In fact, no matter where you are in the gardens, there's an intentional, inviting aspect to enjoy.

## MARRIAGE OF MINDS

Duhon and Harper are truly a study in a simpatico marriage with complementing talents.

"I designed the general layout of the entire project from the beginning of the process," Duhon says. "But then, I handed over all the actual plant selections to my husband, Michael. He's always been obsessed with plants, and he did an amazing job of keeping the property fully landscaped at our previous house."





(ABOVE, RIGHT) TILES ARE THE STAR OF THE SHOW IN THE SON'S BATHROOM. WHILE TILE SHOPPING, THE COUPLE FOUND THIS FLOOR TILE THAT FEATURED A BEGUILING TRIANGLE SHAPE AND INTRIGUING COLORS. "WE BOUGHT THEM WITHOUT KNOWING WHERE WE WOULD INSTALL THEM," DUHON SAYS. AS THE FLOOR PLAN DESIGN WAS DEVELOPED, THIS BATHROOM HAD AN INTERESTING FOOTPRINT DUE TO THE ANGLE OF THE HOUSE. DUHON REALIZED THAT THE TILE THEY HAD PREVIOUSLY SELECTED WOULD BE RIGHT AT HOME HERE.

(LEFT) "I INCORPORATED AN ACME CLADDING SYSTEM (RAIN SCREEN), USING DARK-GRAY PANELS TO COMPLEMENT THE BRICK AND STUCCO," DUHON SAYS OF HIS CAREFULLY SELECTED EXTERIOR MATERIALS.

Harper even showcased that house on the local PBS program, "Central Texas Gardener," so Duhon knew he would create another beautiful landscape for this new property.

We collaborated on types of screening and layering of plants to create spaces that feel larger and private, but he took over from there," Duhon explains.

Now, the property teems with life, and that cedar elm that caused so much initial worry is now an example of solving challenges in ways that add to a project—as opposed to detracting from it. ☼





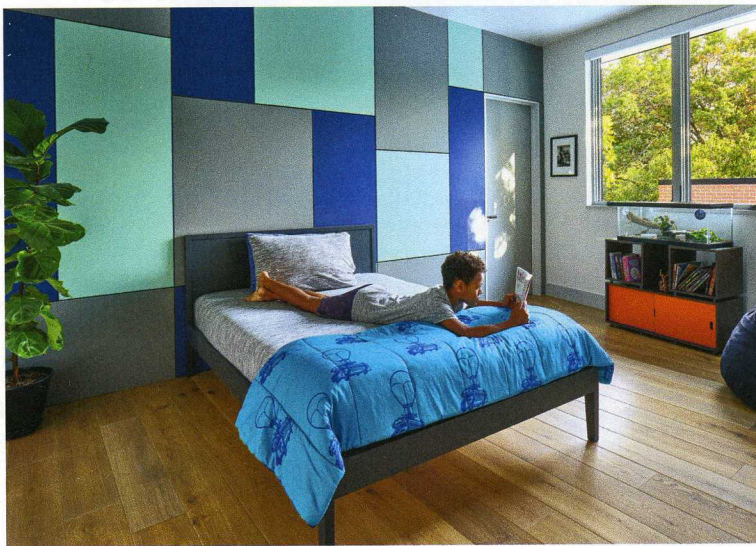
(ABOVE) FROM TRAVELING TO PALM SPRINGS, CALIFORNIA, MANY TIMES, DUHON HAS COME TO APPRECIATE HOMES IN WHICH THE PRIMARY BEDROOM HAS A CONNECTION TO THE POOL; HE IMPLEMENTED THAT HERE. "FURTHERMORE, I WANTED TO HAVE A VIEW OF THE LARGE CENTRAL CEDAR ELM TREE AND LANDSCAPE," HE SAYS. "WRAPPING THE MASONRY INSIDE THE HOUSE IS A VERY CLASSIC MID-CENTURY CONCEPT THAT WAS A PERFECT CONTRAST OF TEXTURE AND COLOR IN THE BEDROOM."

(BELOW, LEFT) IT WAS IMPORTANT TO DUHON TO HAVE TEXTURE AND COLOR COMBINED INTO EACH SPACE. AS A RESULT, FOR HIS CHILDREN'S ROOMS, HE PROVIDED A SIMPLE AND INEXPENSIVE

MDF WALL PANEL SYSTEM. "MY DAUGHTER SELECTED THE THREE DIFFERENT COLORS FOR THE PANELED WALL," HE EXPLAINS.

"IT APPEARS SIMPLE IN THE PHOTO, BUT I SPENT SOME TIME BALANCING THE ASYMMETRICAL WINDOWS, THE LINES OF THE PANELS, THE WINDOWSILL HEIGHTS AND THE BED LOCATION."

(BELOW, RIGHT) BOTH THE SON'S AND DAUGHTER'S ROOMS FEATURE A VISUALLY GRIPPING WALL PANEL SYSTEM, AND THEY, THEMSELVES, CHOSE THE COLORS FOR THE PANELS. THE SON SELECTED A COMBINATION OF NAVY, CYAN AND GRAY. "THE PANELS ADD DIMENSION AND ALSO HELP CARRY HINTS OF THE MID-CENTURY MONDRIAN STYLE," DUHON POINTS OUT.





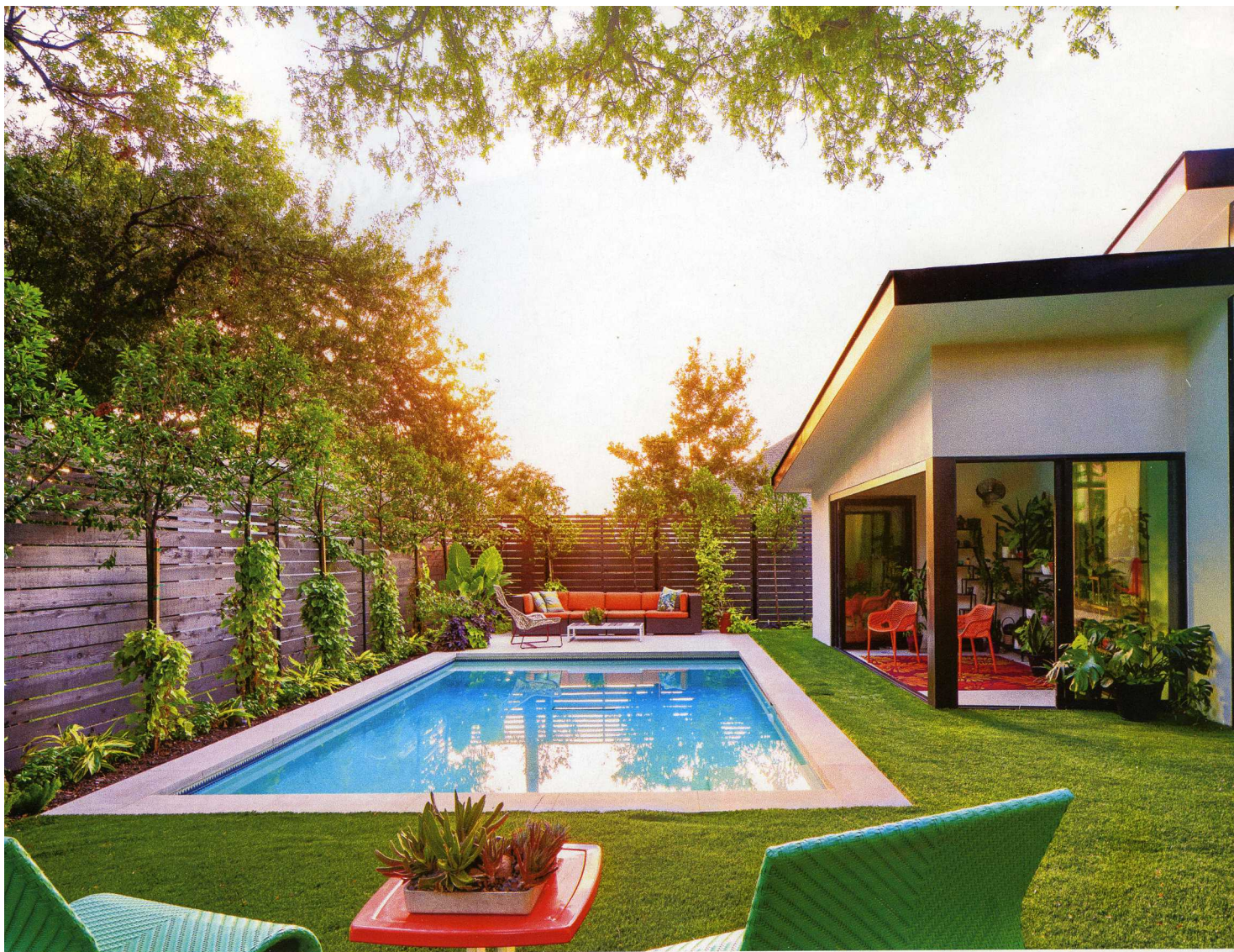


## Zone 8 Garden Smarts

MICHAEL TROY HARPER IS AN EXPERT GARDENER, AND EVERYTHING GREEN ON HIS AND DUHON'S PROPERTY THRIVES BECAUSE OF HIM. HERE, HE SHARES HIS TOP TIPS FOR A HAPPY AND HEALTHY (AND "HAUTE") GARDEN:

- **DRIP, DRIP, DRIP.** "You have to have a drip irrigation system to beat summer heat," Harper advises. A drip irrigation system reaches the roots of the plants and keeps them alive and thriving during the hot months. It also avoids the typical water loss with spray heads.
- **MISSION DEFINITION.** A raised hedge with "standard" shrubs (such as cherry laurel, Japanese blueberry or even "Little Gem" dwarf magnolia) really defines a space and makes for an elegant, extra-tall privacy fence.
- **COLORS WITH COLEUS.** Supplement your perennial plantings with annual color. "My current go-to plant genus is *Coleus*. They look delicate, and the color patterns seem endless. And, given a little shade, they are great in a mixed bed planting," he says.
- **GO VEG.** Harper likes to add some vegetables into his mixed beds. "Okra is a great vertical element that can be harvested," he says. "And Swiss chard is awesome and can last almost year-round."
- **DIVINE VINES.** Don't be afraid to add in some vining annuals and let them roam across other plants. "I love to plant moon flower and morning glory," he says.





(ABOVE) DUHON HAS DESIGNED COUNTLESS POOLS FOR CLIENTS, SO IT WAS HIGH TIME HE HAD ONE FOR HIMSELF AND HIS FAMILY TO ENJOY! THE POOL ADDS A BEAUTIFUL, GLASSY SIGHT LINE OF WATER TO THE BACKYARD. THE COUPLE OFTEN USES IT THROUGHOUT THE SUMMER AND THEN SPENDS NIGHTS ON THE PATIO UNDER THE HEATER.

(RIGHT) MID CENTURY MODERN DESIGN IS FULL OF CLEAN, SIMPLE LINES THAT CONTRAST AND COMPLEMENT NATURE AND THE SURROUNDINGS OF THE SITE. FROM THE HOUSE TO THE PATIO TO THE POOL, THIS GEOMETRY IS FULLY APPARENT AND VISUALLY DRAWS YOU IN.

(OPPOSITE) ORIGINALLY, "WE WERE LOOKING FOR A MOSTLY FLAT LOT, WITH JUST THE RIGHT AMOUNT OF SPACE TO ACCOMMODATE THE INDOOR SPACES AND OUTDOOR LIVING," DUHON SAYS. NOT ONLY DID THIS PROPERTY ALREADY FEATURE AN 800-SQUARE-FOOT HOUSE BUILT IN THE 1940s (WHICH THE COUPLE DONATED), IT ALSO HAD PROTECTED CEDAR ELMS. DESPITE THESE FACTORS, DUHON COULD VISUALIZE JUST HOW THE PROPERTY COULD BE EXPERIENCED THROUGH INTENTIONALLY DESIGNED GARDENS AND A NEW BUILD.

