

ARTISTS' ABODE

By **MAURI ELBEL** | Photography by **MARK MENJIVAR**

When you ask Jene and Jean Laman what they love most about the stunning, one-of-a-kind addition to their home, don't expect a single answer.

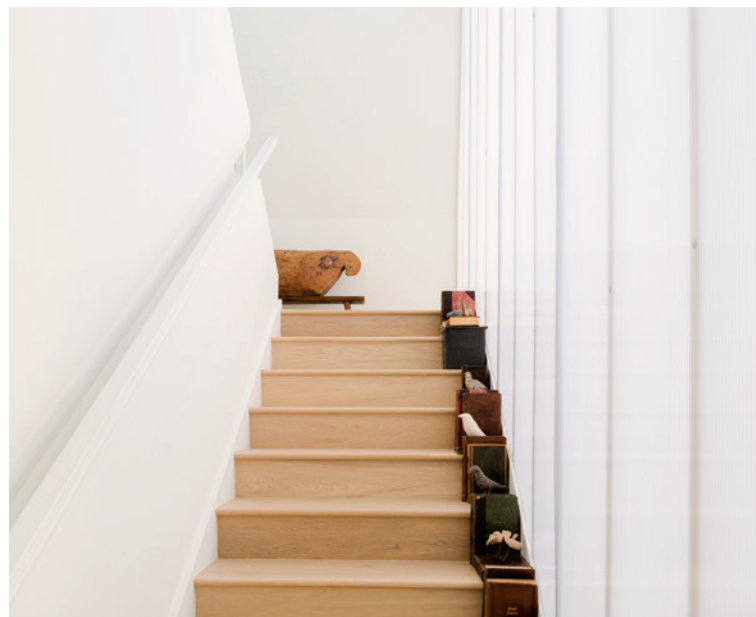
"We love the light quality," Jene says of the new contemporary 2,000-square-foot space designed by A. GRUPPO Architects. "The light in the day time is just fantastic.

It's practically like living outdoors."

"We also like the outdoor-indoor relationship," he continues, explaining that the way the addition is sited on the lot has allowed them to utilize space they couldn't before.

"We also really love the sculptural quality of the plan."



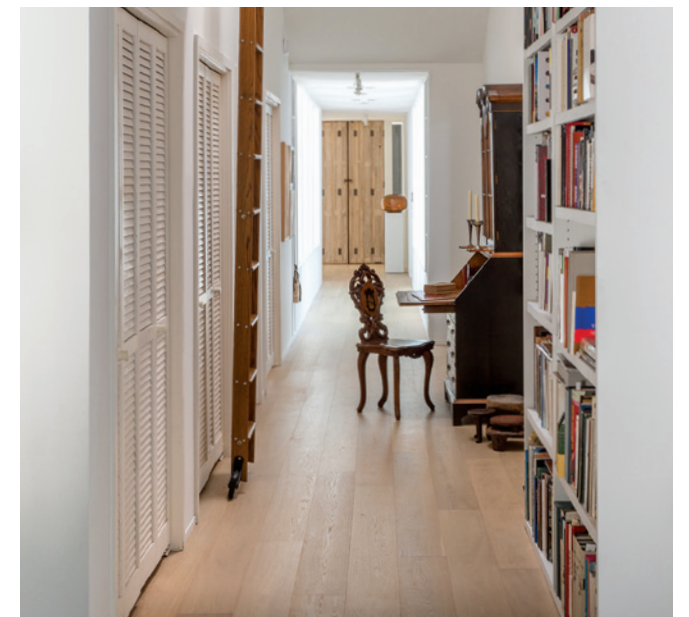


But the octogenarian couple also gushes about the inventive use of materials; the clever marriage of the old structure with the new addition; the upstairs library and reading area surrounded by windows; the sprawling new studio space; their tranquil new master suite; and the extra bathroom and hidden play nook for their grandchildren, cleverly tucked beneath the stairs behind a wall of storage.

“I really can’t think of anything we are displeased with,” Jene says. “We like everything about it.”

After 40 years of teaching at Texas State University, the retired artists decided it was time to add an exhibition gallery, painting studio, library and new master suite to the home they had been living in since 1986 — a modest 1970’s-era, 1,800-square-foot, 3-bedroom, 2-bathroom home built from Heritage Homes plan books originally started by Henry D. Norris AIA.

Both artists and former university professors — Jean taught in the Fibre-Arts Department and Jene hails from the Interior Design Department — the couple had spent nearly three decades





working out of their garage they had converted into a multi-level studio used for paper-making and weaving. After retiring, they wanted to focus on their art and have a nice gallery space to showcase their collection as well as a new painting studio.

When the Lamans contacted A. GRUPPO Architects' principal partners Andrew Nance and Thad Reeves, they supplied them with a specific list of their needs and budget as well as a thick stack of images representing designs and ideas they gravitated toward. Talking with the homeowners now, it's safe to say they didn't just get what they wanted; they got more than they dreamed of.

A. GRUPPO's design-build addition transformed the identity of the Laman's home while respecting the structures that already existed.

"From the beginning, the goals were to find a way to extend the existing house," says Nance. "One of the things Jean said was that she didn't want a typical box. She wanted something a lot more sculptural."

"She was the driver on that, and she was always pushing for something with more form and presence," adds Reeves.

Taking cues from the original layout of the existing home's massing, two identical towers housing the gallery and studio flank

the foyer and upper-level library wrapped in a wall of windows. Clad in a translucent polycarbonate material, the towers were designed to maximize the amount of natural light bathing interior spaces and illuminating the couple's vast art collection on display. Inside the towers, ambient light is filtered by the north facing translucent walls and strategically placed skylights project pools of light through a series of ceiling baffles throughout the day.

Constructed out of SIPS, a structurally insulated panel system, the high-ceiling towers achieve what was intended without the need to incorporate steel or other costly materials. Fabricated off-site by GeoFaze, the panels were not only a way for the architects to control quality, but also to speed up the construction process by simply lifting the pre-cut panels into place and securing them. All walls and roofs are comprised of 10 inches of foam sandwiched in plywood, creating a very well-insulated, energy-efficient structure that only requires using artificial light at night. Sufficiently-insulated and well lit, the energy-efficient home performs at the level a house approximately half its size would, explains Nance.

Throughout the Lamans' house, numerous design decisions spanning site placement to lighting prove good design isn't just about following a client's desires and wish lists.

"You have to really read the house and the existing structure



and make a response to that," Reeves says. "We are always trying to think about the spatial sequence and the light and how the spaces work together through the volumes."

"It is not just about creating a space that looks different, but about creating an experience and a discovery," adds Nance.

The experience begins upon approaching the home. Nestled amongst a dense canopy of live oak and cedar elm trees on a 1.5-acre lot in San Marcos, the home blends into the existing landscape while accommodating a series of outdoor rooms, a secret garden and sculpture courts the couple has carved out over the years. Because the addition is located in a bowl-like depression at the head of a dry creek bed, elevated walkway bridges span over fields of jasmine providing access into the home while allowing water runoff to flow around and between the existing and new structures.

"We love the way they married the two structures," says Jene. "The new home is built closer to the street and it works really well with an interesting walkway between the old and the new that actually gives you a feeling that you are walking from one space into another space."

Entering the home, a light palette of white walls and white oak floors create a gallery-like space that allows the couple's





eclectic art collection to take center stage. The upper-level library, lined with backless book shelves that double as guardrails provide a display area for various art pieces and books that can be seen from below. Perched above the entry, views to the surrounding canopy of trees create an intimate gathering space for conversation and contemplation that Jene says feels a little like being inside a treehouse.

In a more intimate setting, the master bedroom and bathroom open directly into a private zen garden. The master suite was reconfigured through a sensitive addition of a bathing and dressing room while shifting the existing bedroom out, forming a linear gallery hall which bisects the existing house and new addition, explains A. GRUPPO. Moving along the corridor, one becomes aware of the transition between old and new while soaking in framed views of the new outdoor rooms.

The neutral palette inside the home lets the contrasting mix of contemporary furniture and antique pieces, as well as the Laman’s impressive collection of around 50 works of art, take center stage.

Artwork displayed throughout their home is a blend of their own creations such as one of Jene’s personal favorites that rests in the couple’s bedroom: a large scale 6-foot by 7-foot painting on canvas his wife created featuring two chairs with a shelf beneath that holds primitive art and objects the couple has collected over the years. The home reads like a museum, a true gallery of their own creations interspersed with meaningful pieces they have curated from various artists and travels. Some of the artwork on display is from different artists they worked with at the university while other pieces come from yearly trips to Santa Fe or student trips to New York.

“We have a lot we really like,” Jene says, finding it difficult to choose just a few pieces to talk about out of the expansive



collection they have created and curated over the years. “And the art looks even better in the new house.”

Although the addition has more than doubled their home’s original size, it doesn’t feel too big.

“We live all over the house even though it is just the two of us,” says Jene. “It’s fun to move from one space to another. We have really enjoyed it.” ❖

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