

A BREATH OF FRESH AIR

By LEAH WILLIAMS Photography by DROR BALDINGER



A longstanding family ranch in the Texas Hill Country needed a place where generations could gather in the great outdoors — specifically a contemporary structure on the ranch's highest point surrounded by expansive views. The challenge was to honor the old while building a path to the new; a place that would bridge past and present for generations to come.

“Our charge was to create an addition to this ranch that was clearly modern, but harmonized with what came before,” says Brantley Hightower, founding partner of Hi-Works, an architectural firm out of San Antonio and Boulder, Co. What came before had been there since the 1930s — a hunting lodge that “was really cool, but was very dark and brooding, with a lot of small windows.” A tiny attached screened porch was barely a mudroom, much less a place for celebrations.

So began a three-year collaborative journey between family and architects to breathe new life into a treasured property by constructing a not-so-far pavilion, connected to the main building by way of a 15-foot walkway that stretches from a newly enlarged screened porch over a landscaped drainage swale. It was the perfect solution, says Hightower, who worked with HiWorks associate Betsy Johnson on the project, along with landscape architect John Troy, structural engineer Calvetti & Associates, lighting designer Dave Nelson & Associates and Henry Duecker Construction.

The bridge effect was genius. The team had discussed other options, says Hightower, “but we liked the idea of the sound of your feet walking over this wooden bridge. You go through a psychological transition of moving from the protection and seclusion of the house to a more open connection with the landscape.”

Once there, various details echo the design and materials from inside the lodge, the most prevalent being the original stone that Hightower describes as a mix of limestone and a little bit of granite. To age the new pieces from Texas Stone Supply, “Duecker took

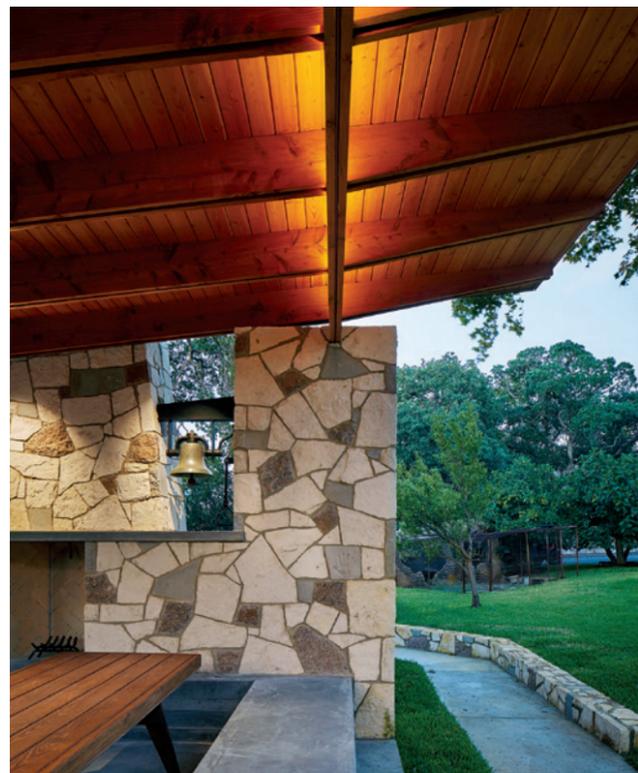


some decomposed tree leaves from the site, created this watery mush, and then rinsed it over the stone to stain it.” The multi-colored tile from the existing building’s chimney is repeated on the counter next to the Saber® outdoor grill. Under the barbecue is a wall of board formed concrete, also used in the pavilion’s foundation and its benches to create a rustic, imperfect feel.

Unquestionably the most striking design feature of the 570-square-foot dining pavilion is the standing seam metal roof, whose winged shape maximizes the prevailing breezes — a must during long, Texas summers. “Outdoor ceiling fans can be dicey,” says Hightower, “and we didn’t want to clutter up the space.” The incoming air is compressed by the butterfly roof. “When

you increase the volume of air moving through space it increases the velocity of that air, creating the Venturi effect.”

The roof was also a way to balance out the overall design, giving a sense of flight and freedom to the stone-heavy structure. Water is another precious resource that is used here to maximum effect; a single steel scupper funnels rainwater to irrigate the immediate landscape. At night the roof takes on a special gleam, as LED strip lighting fixtures from BK Lighting, MP Lighting and LED Linear illuminate the underside of the roof, making the warm stained Douglas fir appear lantern-lit. “You don’t see the fixtures,” says Hightower, “but the entire underside becomes a kind of glowing plane.”



The multilayered complexity of the roof is deceptively plain, and that's not the only place illusion is in play. Adds Johnson: "For example, all four columns are different heights. It's one of those things where you work hard to make things appear simple." A whimsical nod to the past is a bell from an historic locomotive adjacent to the outdoor fireplace, connected to an old stirrup found on the ranch site and made into a custom pull.

For the family, the most poignant feature is the mark left by the youngest generation, set in stone, so to speak. Says Hightower: "We created 18 concrete fake stones cut and shaped to look like the others, did a series of castings where the family pressed their hands in, and then integrated them into the stonework."

It's that kind of detail, says Hightower, that gives depth to all design, and particularly this one. "Good architecture exists on multiple scales at the same time. It tells a story as it's built. All of this tells a story — the lodge, the bridge, the handprints and the glowing roof plane that acts as a beacon asking people to come, gather and enjoy." ❖

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