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# INTO THE WILD

NATURE TAKES CENTER STAGE IN A QUIETLY MODERN HOUSE NESTLED INTO ONE OF THE MOST DRAMATIC SETTINGS IN SAN ANTONIO.

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ARCHITECTURE / TOBIN SMITH, TOBIN SMITH ARCHITECT  
INTERIOR DESIGN / MARK ASHBY AND LILLIE CLARK, MARK ASHBY DESIGN  
HOME BUILDER / JEFF TRUAX AND JIM TRUAX, TRUAX CONSTRUCTION INC.  
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE / CHRISTINE TEN EYCK AND CAMERON CAMPBELL, TEN EYCK LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS

The architecture is about an unfolding experience and an understanding of the site," says architect Tobin Smith of the residence he recently completed for homeowners Dacia and Lanham Napier and their children. "As you progress into the house at entry level, you soon find yourself hovering in the trees." Situated in one of San Antonio's oldest neighborhoods, the 3-acre property appears to be in the wilds of Texas, an impression owed to its precipitously sloping topography that merges into a rocky wet-weather ravine.

The homeowners learned about Smith through a friend, initially consulting with him about remodeling the property's original residence. Working with the architect, they eventually decided to build anew, to better position the main living spaces in the most dynamic place where the site could be experienced and appreciated with the most intensity. "The great room of the original house looked across the ravine—the short dimension of the site—to the neighbors' backyards," Smith explains. "The new living-and-dining room is rotated 90 degrees from the original and straddles the ravine, addressing the long dimension of the site with no hints of neighbors."

Dacia was involved in every step of the process. An avid art collector and nature lover, she assembled a team of professionals committed to her passion for both the site and art. Smith first recommended landscape architect Christine Ten Eyck, known for connecting people with their region through outdoor spaces and landscapes. Ten Eyck then suggested designer Mark Ashby, a virtuoso of understated style. Art consultant Alexis Armstrong of Armstrong Art Consulting was already onboard: "We had been working together for years as Dacia assembled her own art collection," says Armstrong. Builders Jeff Truax and Jim Truax and lighting expert Christina Brown of Studio Lumina also signed on to round out the team.



Shirazeh Houshiary's *Blue Cloud*, 2015, and Robert Mangold's *Attic Series I-V*, 1991, flank a light-filled hallway featuring Fleetwood windows and rugs from Black Sheep Unique. Datum Engineers handled the home's structural engineering, with civil engineering by Pape-Dawson Engineers. Wally Baker of Casa Verde Landscaping installed the landscaping.



In the living room, a Fort Street Studio Diamond rug anchors Archibald chairs by Poltrona Frau from Scott + Cooner. The Anvil cocktail table, Carpo suede club chairs and XY benches are all by Holly Hunt from George Cameron Nash. The Vienna Way Group sofa by Marmol Radziner is from Cory Pope & Associates.

Graham Caldwell's *Untitled*, 2012, crowns Emmemobili's Brug console from Scott + Cooner in the dining room. A Michael Anastassiades pendant from Nilufar Gallery in Milan illuminates a table with a Hudson base from David Sutherland and a top designed by Mark Ashby in collaboration with Phillip Sell of Sell Design Group. Minotti chairs are from New York's DDC.



The group faced inherent challenges, which they overcame with striking results. "Because of the ravine, the site was very difficult to build on," says Jeff Truax. The meticulously calibrated modern design conceived by Smith, who worked alongside project manager Kenny Brown, also required absolute precision. "The roof, doors, windows, walls and ceilings—all the parts of the house—had to fit within an eighth of an inch," Jeff Truax explains. The main body of the copper-limestone-and-glass structure parallels the ravine on the hillside. Because the home is dug into the hillside, only the second story is visible at street level, where living and dining areas occupy a wing that extends into a grove of oak trees and is hidden from the street, as well. Perpendicular to this bridge of rooms, the kitchen, entry and bedrooms also face the lush panorama. A dramatic roofline tilts up at a 12-degree angle above the great room, like an open lid. The effect directs

the view in the living areas, making the site's natural beauty a presence in the family's everyday life. "This room is where you get a full understanding of the site," says Smith. The lower level includes a game room, guest room, office and gym.

For the interiors, Ashby, along with designer Lillie Clark, worked with Dacia to create a new concept. "They were starting over completely," says Ashby, noting the goal was to "bring the beauty of nature inside and create a livable space filled with only the highest-quality pieces." Starting anew allowed them to make selections with a curator's eye, beginning with the furnishings—most are from Italy or France and took months to construct—and then focusing on accessories, all the way down to 1950s Gio Ponti flatware. No detail was too small: Ashby even created a custom scent profile. Accommodating the request for livable, family-friendly furnishings, the designer selected durable pieces for longevity and "fabrics such as crushed

Artist Alyson Shotz's *Allusion of Gravity*, 2014, featuring glass beads and stainless-steel wire, hangs above an island in the kitchen topped with Pietra Cardosa from Architectural Tile & Stone. The Holly Hunt Siren barstools are from George Cameron Nash; the Wolf gas range and Sub-Zero refrigerator are from Kiva Kitchen & Bath.

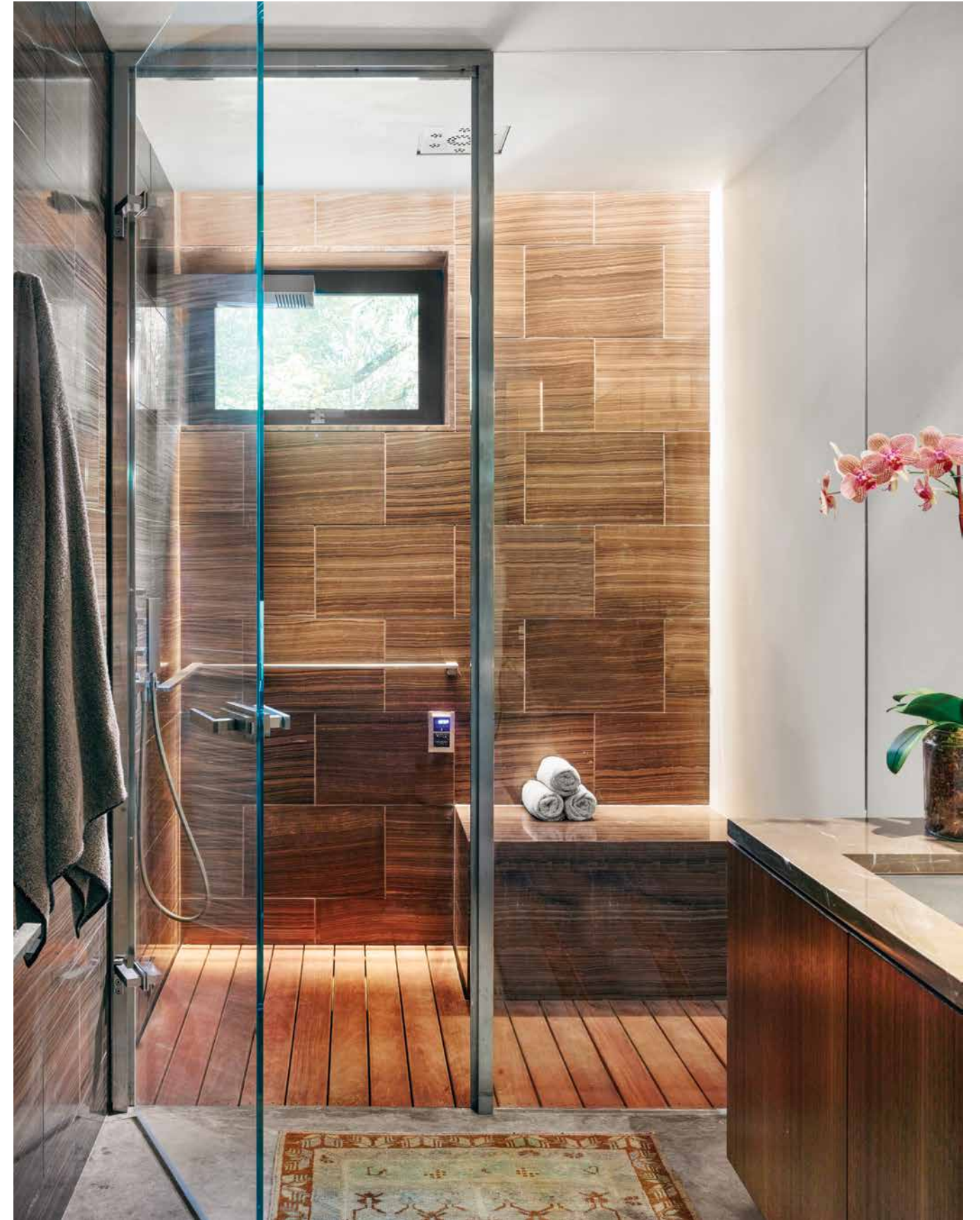


**Opposite:** A hallway wall showcasing Teresita Fernández's graphite-and-magnet piece, *Sfumato (September 18)*, 2009, leads the way to Alex Prager's archival pigment prints entitled *Eye Series*, 2012. The vintage Oushak rug from Black Sheep Unique tops flooring from Wood Co.

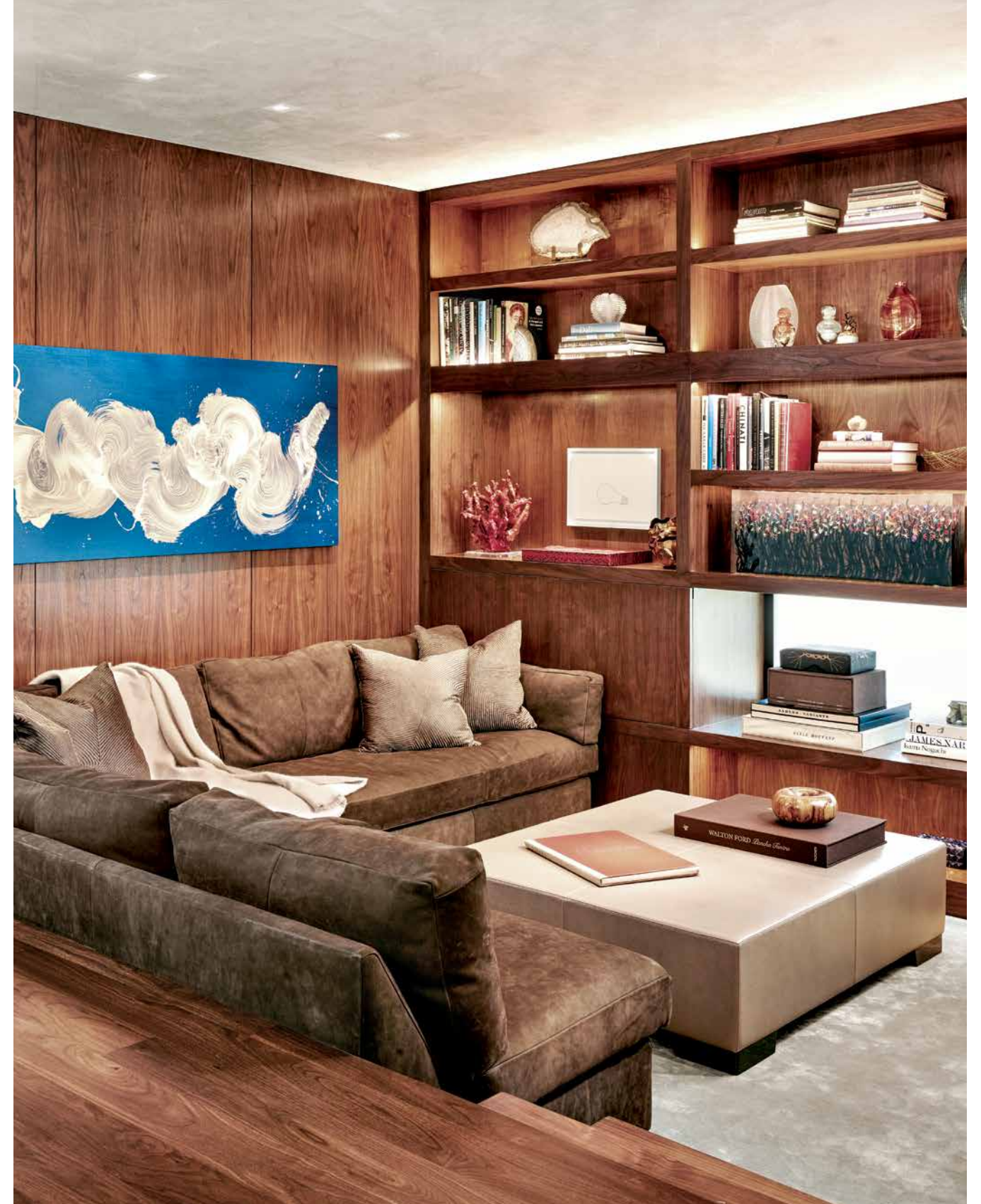
**Below:** The downstairs den houses an Anfibio chair, designed by Alessandro Becchi for Giovannetti and purchased from Sputnik Modern; George Nakashima's Conoid table from Adam Edelsberg in Providence, Rhode Island; and a Silas Seandel coffee table from Weinberg Modern in New York. The Minotti sofa, armchair and rug are all from Scott + Cooner; M&M Metals handled the metalwork in the pool area and throughout.



Yann Arthus-Bertrand's *Sandbank Queensland, Australia* C-print joins Waddy Armstrong's *Untitled*, 2007, in the guest bedroom. The bed and nightstand, both Minotti from DDC, top a rug from Fort Street Studio. Ashby sourced the vintage Masayuki Kurosawa Lavinia lamps (one is shown here) from Skalar in Hudson, New York, and Galerie Jean-Louis Danant in Paris. The bedding is Anichini.



For the guest bathroom, Truax Construction enlisted Sublime Custom Stone to cut slabs of Eramosa from Architectural Tile & Stone into tiles. The Persian Hunting rug is from Black Sheep Unique. The custom cabinetry is by Truax Construction.



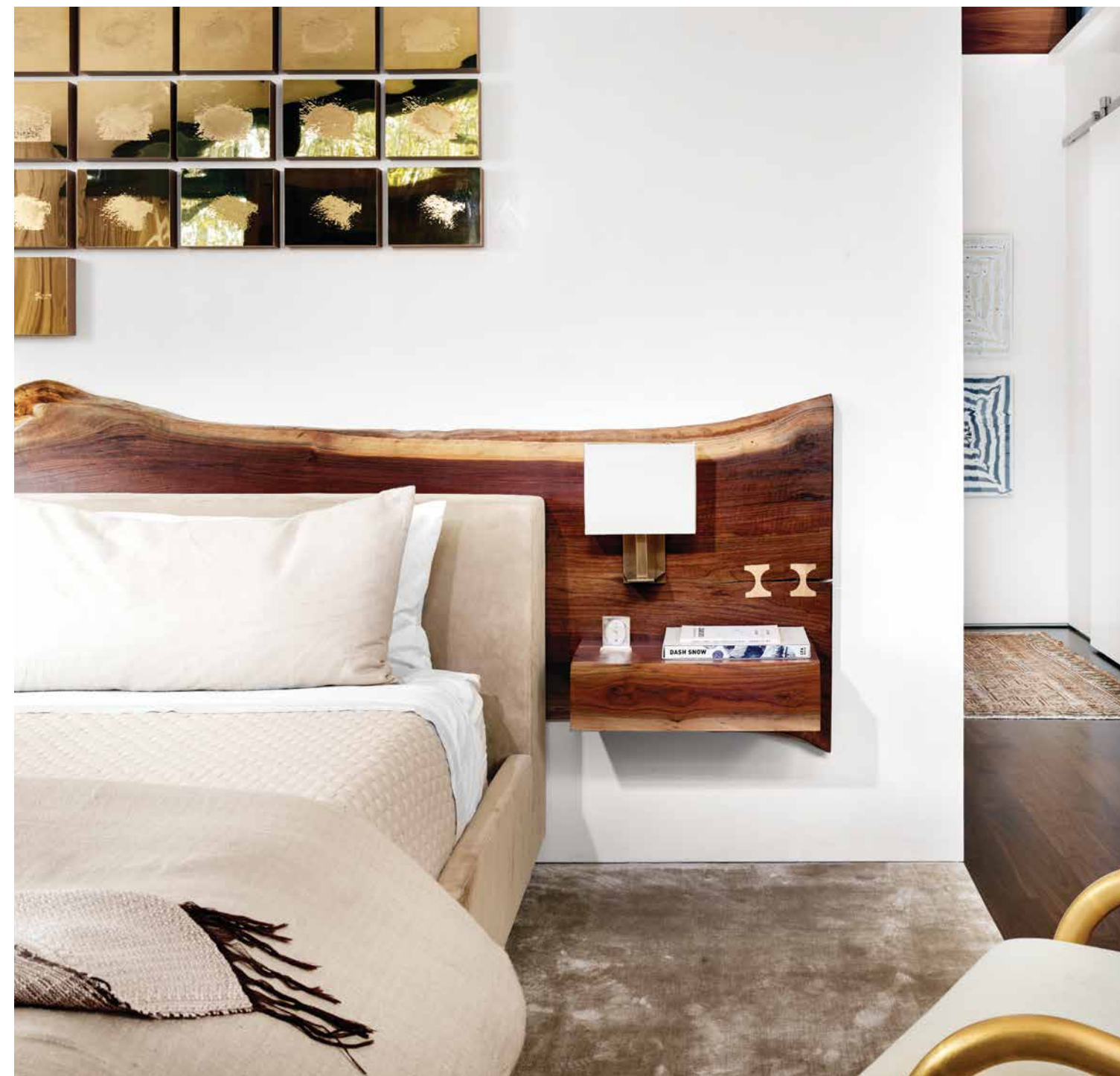
Ashby custom-designed the Gregoire sofa by Verellen to fit the sunken den as though it were built into the architecture (below and opposite). Rosecore's Simplicity Abyss carpet from Schroeder is the mainstay. The Christian Liaigre for Holly Hunt ottoman, in Holly Hunt's Great Plains leather, is from George Cameron Nash. James Nares' *Left Lane*, 2011, hangs above the sofa.

**"THE ARCHITECTURE IS ABOUT AN UNFOLDING EXPERIENCE AND AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE SITE."**

-TOBIN SMITH



Daniel Knorr's *Depression Elevation*, 2014, is a focal point in the master bathroom, which features Ocean Blue travertine from Architectural Tile & Stone. A John Dickinson table from Liz O'Brien in New York, a Myra Mimplitsch-Gray Chiclet tray, a David Ebner stool from Pamela Lerner Antiques in Bellport, New York, and a rug from Black Sheep Unique complete the scene.



velvet and suede that get better with age," he says. This includes the living room's blue suede armchairs and velvet-covered Marmol Radziner sofa. With Dacia's love of nature in mind, Ashby also "looked to elements such as wood and metal and selected a color palette that would play off colors in nature as a way to bring the outside in," he says. This includes commissioning the master bedroom's wood-slab headboard by Attie Jonker. Art, including Walton Ford's crocodile watercolor in the living area, also alludes to nature.

Outside, Dacia and Armstrong integrated sculpture into the landscape with Ten Eyck's help, while Ten Eyck collaborated with colleague Cameron Campbell to design

the front entry, auto court, condensate grotto fountain and pond, plus meandering trails. "This is an inspirational site," Ten Eyck says. "The trails invite you to experience the property from different perspectives." Dacia's strategy to blend art, architecture and design was deliberate. "In my mind, you can't have one component without the other," Dacia says. With nature as the common thread for everyone involved, Dacia's approach helped the team embrace the challenge of building a home above a steep ravine. "We are thrilled by the result," Smith says. "The house gives the homeowners the experience they wanted—a retreat within the city—by editing the neighborhood context and focusing on the natural realm." ■

Teresita Fernández's brass *Golden (30 Dissolves)*, 2012, contrasts with the master bedroom's custom wood headboard with integrated nightstands by Attie Jonker of Green Wood Milling Company. The Pampa bed, Ultimo rug and Departure sconce with silk shade are all by Holly Hunt from George Cameron Nash. The bedding is Anichini.