



LIGHT AND BRIGHT Clockwise from top left: Lower windows capture garden views in the studio; a bridge leads to the entry, where the steel-and-glass pivot door is framed by massaranduba planks; natural light, an ever-present theme in the Laman residence, brightens a stairwell.



SAN MARCOS

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A new addition to a much-loved house is the work of a lifetime for a young-at-heart San Marcos couple.

By Helen Thompson
Photography by Dror Baldinger

The notion of maturity elicits a complicated range of reactions—from unpleasant associations with parental reprimands to act our age to awe at the accretion of experience and expertise that empowers creativity. The painter Claude Monet created his *Water Lilies* series when he was in his 80s; Henri Matisse's experiments with paper cutouts of ever-increasing size became a symbol of sophisticated verve. Perhaps the urge to create always bests mundane expectations. So when a married couple in their 80s approached Thad Reeves and Andrew Nance of San Marcos- and Dallas-based A.Grupo Architects (agruppo.com) about remodeling their master suite and adding an exhibition gallery, a painting studio, a library and a sculpture garden to their home, the 800-pound gorilla in the room—the couple's age—was a nonissue.

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...CONTINUED For 38 years, Jene Laman was a professor in the interior design department at Texas State University, where architect Nance also taught. Laman's wife, Jean, a fiber art expert, was a professor in TSU's art department for 38 years. "They are both very young at heart," says Nance. More significant than the homeowners' youthfulness was the fact that the new addition would be the realization of a long-held dream, a prospect that intrigued the architects. "Living in one place over a long period of time and addressing changing needs offers a unique opportunity to rethink an environment," says Reeves.

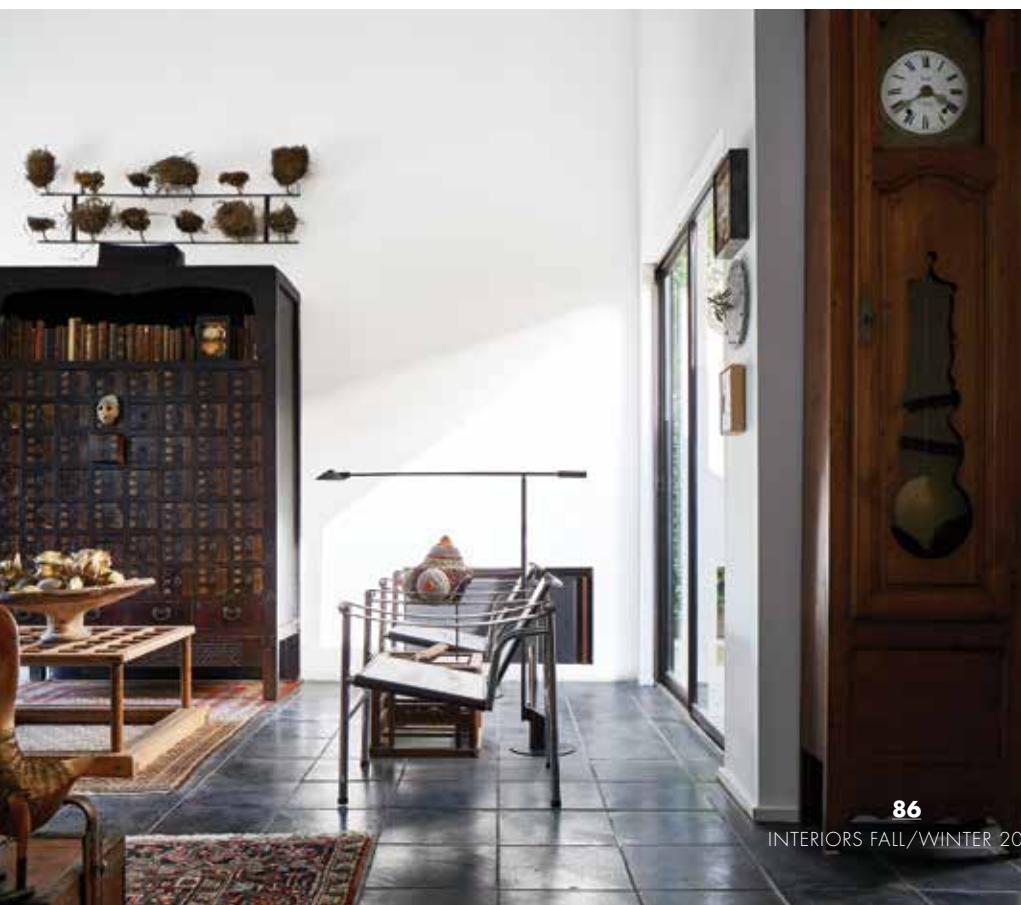
Longevity was indeed a factor; the Lamans had been in their 1980s-era house for more than 30 years. The modern dwelling is a tripartite arrangement of two shed roofs flanking a central core, and over the last 30-plus years, the energetic pair carved out a series of outdoor rooms, a secret garden and sculpture courts. But in the process of devising outdoor living space, they had also used up most of their tree-filled acre, meaning the front yard was the only place left for an addition. "This was an opportunity," notes Reeves, "to completely transform the existing house—to change its identity and to create a new entry."

The architects developed a plan for a pair of Galvalume-clad towers, which serve as the gallery and the studio. The two-story asymmetrical shapes balance the two wings that bookend the original house. A glass-front foyer and the glass-enclosed library above it connect the towers to each other and are the starting point for a glass-sided gallery that leads to the original house.

Nance and Reeves never lost sight, though, that the motivation for the addition was to make



BLENDING OLD AND NEW Clockwise from top: Ambient light in the addition is filtered through skylights that project pools of light through a series of ceiling baffles throughout the day; a view of the connecting bridge between the old and new house; the grandfather clock marks the place where the addition intersects with the original house.



room for displaying art. They made the pursuit easy by incorporating high ceilings and windows that endow the rooms with a sense of space and light. But too much light will destroy photographs, paintings and fabrics, and the architects hit upon an ingenious solution. They sheathed the north-facing ends of the two towers in polycarbonate glazing, a rigid plastic that's almost as transparent as glass and is also insulated. Polycarb is most commonly used for greenhouses, but it becomes glamorous in the Lamans' two towers now enlivened with two stories' worth of soft light. Nance and Reeves enjoyed the Lamans' sense of adventure, and both are convinced that the engaging spaces were a result of what the artistic couple contributed to the process. "This house reflects a mastery of artistry and composition," says Nance, "that only maturity and the passage of time can achieve." ■