

EVERYBODY'S HOME





A Hill Country hacienda
achieves the owners' desire
for a home shared by all

By JENNA KASHOU // Photography by DROR BALDINGER



The O'Mesa home is a Hill Country hacienda that almost wasn't. "Every day I wake up, and I think, 'I don't know how it happened,'" says one of the homeowners. "In every sense of the word, this home is a miracle to me." Ready to call off the project even before construction began in 2010, she took a hike early one morning with her dog and with Bible in hand. While watching the sunrise, she opened the Bible, and the first passage was Matthew 7:24: "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock."

Call it divine intervention, but that was all the assurance the owner, a psychotherapist, and her husband needed to make this home just north of Fredericksburg a reality. Nicknamed O'Mesa (a cheeky combination of their surname and the surrounding natural

environment), the native stone home sits atop a hill overlooking Enchanted Rock. The main house (there are also three casitas) has been placed on the 50-acre lot so that French doors open up to the back patio and pool and perfectly frame the massive granite dome. In fact, the entire house is in alignment with the magnificent view so you can look from the front door through the courtyard and out the back. And that, of course, was no accident. Every little detail of the property, down to the color scheme for the fabrics plucked from Smithsonian photographs, was meticulously planned.

The homeowners found the raw, sprawling lot in 2009 after frequent visits to the Hill Country from out of state. Construction started in 2010, after tireless research and one scrapped design. The U.S. was in the middle of the Great Recession then, and theirs



The native stone exterior (opposite) greets visitors upon arrival; the great room (above) features ample seating for the homeowners' family; each casita (left) is two levels; family members can access the courtyard through a gate.





A 17th century Spanish Colonial coffee table (opposite) is one of many antiques in the house; the property has enough bedrooms (left) to accommodate three children and six grandchildren; kitchen cabinets were distressed to look old.

was the only home being built in the area. “The artisans we worked with were incredible and were only all available because no one else was crazy enough to build a home during that time,” she admits. After two years of construction, they moved into the home, having achieved their objective: a comfortable family home that could be shared.

The main house at the front of the compound hides the three casitas, which open up to each other in a central courtyard. Each self-contained casita can only be entered from the courtyard and has a master bedroom, small bedroom (also used as an office or nursery), bathroom and kitchenette. This setup was meant to allow for the family to gather but still be able to retreat to a private space to sleep. The homeowners, empty nesters with three children and six grandchildren, were forward thinking so that their family and children’s needs could evolve.

The main house has a master bedroom, office, exercise room, kitchen, catering kitchen and great room. The total square footage of the home, including the three casitas, is 6,100, with another 4,000 for porches and balconies.

Cary Kipp, of Kipp Flores Architects, and Jim Donaldson, of D2 Construction, brought the concept to life. The historical U-shaped design of the home and courtyard was common in Spanish Colonial homes, also built around family. Kipp’s design for the partially enclosed courtyard created a transitional space from the broad open acreage to a more intimate outdoor entry. Meanwhile, interior designer Amy Slaughter, of Fredericksburg-based Slaughter Design Studio, worked with the homeowner on her vision for creating a timeless look that pays homage to the early settlers and ethnic influences of the area.

“There was a lot of time and energy spent on researching the details,” Slaughter says. “I’ve actually never been as invested in the research on a home as I have been for this one.”

The inspiration for both the construction and interior design came from the confluence of French, German, Mexican, Native American and Spanish cultures in the Hill Country. “The homeowners wanted to embrace those influences of the early settlers, so they made deliberate choices with historical context with both the building techniques and the decor,” Slaughter says. “We wanted the home to feel as though it could have been built years ago, but yet, it would still be here years from now.”

Slaughter and the homeowners chose reclaimed barn wood







for the entire house and antique beams and posts. The floors are antique American oak and all the cabinets were finished to look old and like repurposed furniture. The tactile beauty of the natural textures in the home is striking—best exemplified in the chipped limestone exterior, the undulating hardwood floors, hand-troweled plastered walls and layered textiles. “Every element in the home is true in its natural form,” Slaughter says. “Nothing is contrived.”

Sourcing materials like the antique planks for the flooring, antique doors from Central and South America, and the art and antiques from around the world was both time-consuming and costly. But the homeowner knew that if she was going to undertake this project, it had to be done to the best of her abilities and reflect the surrounding natural environment. This dedication to authenticity is one of the reasons the home stands out. More items of note are the German timber and chinking construction and Mexican, French and Italian antique chandeliers, rugs, art and artifacts.

One of Slaughter’s favorite details is the layering of textiles such as cotton mini prints, Native American blankets, ruffles, hides and antique Pendleton blankets. These were pulled directly from

online pictures at the Smithsonian Institution Archives website of important tribe members, mainly Comanche and Kiowa. Slaughter applied for a permit for the right to reuse the images and gifted them to the homeowners.

Tremendous research also went into the size of windows. Old photographs of homes in the area directed how the design team trimmed out the windows, omitting the base molding to replicate both the look and proportion used in decades past.

Additional Spanish Colonial details in the master bath include custom tile that is made to look like old terracotta Saltillo tile, done by Rahnee Gladwin, of Fredericksburg. The bathroom’s sink faucet also features a hand-painted arabesque tile for its backsplash.

This home represents a true collaborative effort of the builder, interior designer, homeowners and architect, which makes it all the more relevant that it was built to be shared. “When people come to our home, I want them to feel as though they can kick their feet up and let their cares go,” says the homeowner. “I want them to feel a sense of environment that surrounds the home, and I want them to feel the presence of God and feel at peace. I don’t think of it as my home. I did it as a gift to our family and to share with others.” ●



The master bedroom (opposite, right) features chinking on the wall behind the bed; like the rest of the property, the casita bedrooms (opposite, left; bottom left and bottom right), stairwell (far left) and bath tub all have traditional details.

