



# BACK at the RANCH

By Angela Rabke Photography by Dror Baldinger

Born and bred in rural South Texas, San Antonio architect Elizabeth Haynes has a rancher's ethos when it comes to her work: be responsive to the environment, be patient, do what's right and always be friendly. When Elizabeth and her client first met, they immediately felt a certain kinship over their similar experiences south of town. "He is a lawyer by day, but he's a rancher the rest of the time," said Elizabeth.





Naturally, her client had just purchased a ranch-style home located in San Antonio's lovely Olmos Park neighborhood. It needed a major overhaul, but "it was a well-taken care of house," said Elizabeth. "It had really good bones to begin with." Originally designed by respected San Antonio architect Stanford Busby in 1957, the home was carefully planned around several groups of mature Heritage Oak trees — so while the limestone walls and low-sloped gable roofs were typical of the era, the rambling layout was, and is, quite unique.

The goal was to transform the residence in a way that realized the client's vision of a contemporary, modern space while remaining true to the original spirit of the house. Elizabeth assembled what turned out to be a dream team: Voyles/Orr Builders served as the General Contractor, Amy Escamilla of Studio E Architecture and Interiors worked on interior design, and Elizabeth led the charge. "I enjoyed the process as much as the results," Elizabeth recalled. "We had a trifecta of talented and amazing people. Everyone was united around the same goal and each person truly took ownership."





The home is quiet and unassuming from the street, pushed further back on the lot so that the surrounding oak trees take center stage. To enter, visitors wind through an open porte-cochère, drawn into another cluster of trees before approaching the main entrance, which is at the rear of the home. Elizabeth chose to keep the original exterior stonework, while removing dated vertical siding and quite a lot of ornamental grapevine metalwork. These elements were replaced with fused bamboo horizontal planks, which work well with the existing limestone, and simple steel tube columns, which replaced the busy originals to minimize disruption of the lush views. The original arched door was updated with a contemporary walnut slat door that includes a steel and glass inlay and contrasts with the surrounding siding.

Over time, renovations and additions had left the home's interior compartmentalized and dark. The team stripped it down to its bones, removing dark paneling, tons of carpet and opening up and rearranging spaces. Elizabeth, well-aware of the client's deference for nature, carefully opened up peaceful views of the landscape in almost every interior space, in-

cluding the master closet. Even with all of the windows, the owner's privacy is never compromised because of the home's orientation on the large lot.

The living room is connected to the backyard with ten-foot tall sliding glass doors that center on the awe-inspiring trees. A steel-clad pass-through fireplace is the dramatic centerpiece of the room, connecting it to the dining room, which features warm walnut cabinetry. Existing structural roof beams were also clad in walnut to create a connection to the cabinetry and the many walnut doors throughout the house. The client's striking art collection often recalls his South Texas roots, adding personality, texture and color throughout.

The kitchen was originally designed as a closed-off servants' space. The redesign involved opening the entire space and creating a connection to the main living space, which is both modern and inviting. An eat-in island with soapstone countertops provides a casual dining space, and paired with glass tile and quartz countertops, the surrounding walnut cabinets are a contemporary nod to the popular wood paneling of the home's original era.





Finally, the vintage home was outfitted with cutting edge technology. Lighting, security, temperature and sound are all controlled by a central system that can be managed remotely. The speakers are integrated into the ceiling, and light fixtures and air ducts are flush-mounted without trim for a clean ceiling appearance. These almost imperceptible details achieve the contemporary look that the client desired, while the warm palette honors the home's history.

When all was said and done, the design process took about a year, while the remodel took about 18 months — and everyone involved loved every moment of it. When asked about her favorite part of the house, Elizabeth said “...the process. I really loved the end product, but we had such a good process. Everyone felt so happy and proud, and the client really trusted us and allowed us to do our best work.”

She adds, “When people trust the process, it really works. Sometimes things can take a little longer, but a well-thought out project, where all of the kinks are worked out before construction, goes much more smoothly.” Completed, the ranch house reflects the owner's contemporary aesthetic while it remains true to its roots — just like the South Texas team who made it happen. ♦

**ARCHITECT** Elizabeth Haynes Architect  
210-422-7484 | [www.ehaynesarch.com](http://www.ehaynesarch.com)