



TIKI TIME

By James Frierson | Photography by Andrea Calo

One of the most unique home fixtures in Austin, the Moai Ice House brings South Pacific flavor to Central Texas with a fun, impeccably-designed entertainment space of colored lights, authentic touches and plenty of spirits to create unforgettable experiences.

The project was designed by Studio Steinbomer, who previously worked with the homeowners on a Lockhart property where the Moai Ice House was originally going to be built. “We had no design ordinances to contend with and plenty of space to build upon,” says architect Jennifer Vrazel, but a move to Austin meant the project was under new “city ordinances governing design, as well as an active HOA with design standards.” With a little creative flexibility, such as substituting stone veneer for the structure that was originally going to be all wood, Studio Steinbomer accomplished a miraculous slice of island life right in their clients’ back yard.

The Moai Ice House coalesces from hundreds of little details into a cohesive spectacle. Caroline, one of the homeowners, describes the inspiration for the ice house as a logical evolution of their fascination with all things tiki, including their “collection of art, tiki mugs, booze,” and other odds and ends that began to outgrow their space. “We decided to look for a home that we could build on to have our dream space for all of our tiki treasures,” says Caroline. With Studio Steinbomer’s guidance,

Caroline was able to achieve her vision. “We collaborated with her on the interior architecture,” says Jennifer, “but the interior design and aesthetic was all hers.”

The beauty of the building comes from a careful eye that hones the image while maintaining a lively chaos like one would expect to find in a beach-side hut full of travelers. For example, one of the must-have features for the homeowners were the many light boxes suspended from the ceiling. “There are 40 lights, to be specific,” says Caroline, “some from closed down tiki bars from around the country... [and] others made new in a tiki style.” The structure was always built with expansion in mind because, as Caroline puts it, “with tiki you are always adding things that you collect along the way.”

It’s this genuine “enthusiasm,” says Jennifer, for the tiki aesthetic that initially drew them to the project for she and the team found it “intoxicating and contagious.” By the end of production, Jennifer says Studio Steinbomer “really learned a great deal about tiki culture both in the past and as a continued passion today.” Caroline gifted everyone comprehensive books on the history of tiki, which were absorbed happily, while “she herself was an amazing resource for design solutions.” Caroline echoes this sentiment, calling the entire experience fantastic. The team “immersed themselves in tiki...[everyone] brought great ideas and details to the design that really brought it all together.”

Now, Caroline says the best part of having company over “is when they walk in for the first time, as most people cannot quite conceive what it is until they see it.” She loves to observe the “wonder and wow” on friends’ faces as they take in the details before stopping on the “Elvis bathroom to bring it all home.” Caroline uses the space to “hang out with friends, enjoy some tasty cocktails, have lots of laughs and make new memories. That’s really what it’s about,” she concludes, “and why it exists at all.” ♦

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