



CLIFFHANGER RESOLVED

A 25-FOOT DROP WASN'T ENOUGH TO SHY
A.GRUPPO ARCHITECTS AWAY FROM
A STUNNING PROPERTY TEETERING
ON THE EDGE OF A RAVINE.
THE SOLUTION WAS OBVIOUS —
CANTILEVER THE HOME OFF THE CLIFF.

By **Drew Henry** | Photography by **Charles Davis Smith**





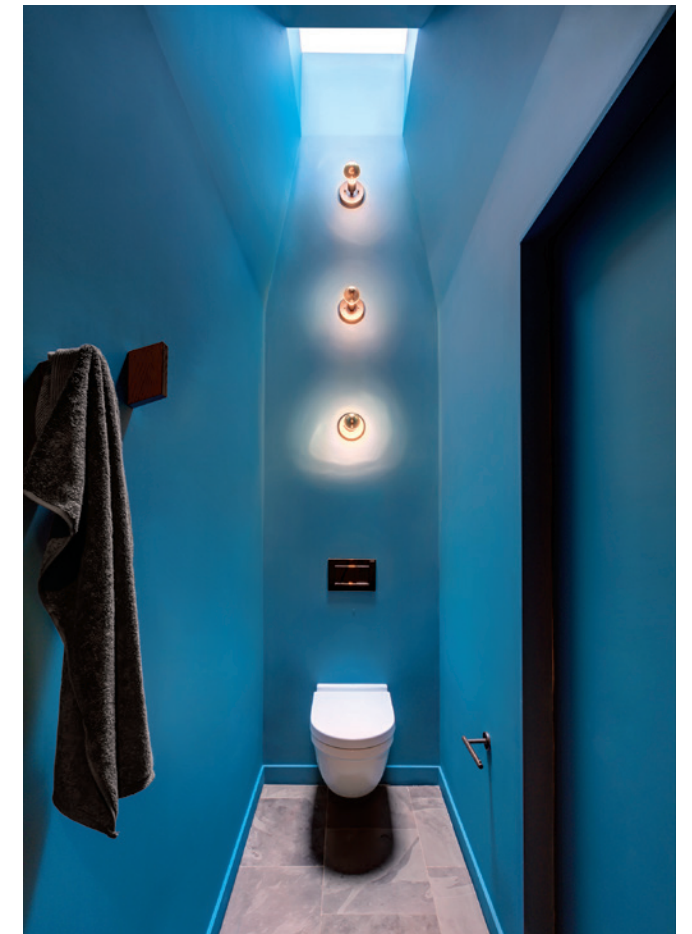
THE URBAN RESERVE NEIGHBORHOOD IN DALLAS, Texas, features rows of expertly crafted modern homes overlooking stunning tree canopy views. While most of these houses sit on flat lots, one site posed a unique design challenge that A.Grupo architects couldn't resist. "Our Vanguard House project sits on a very distinct lot in the neighborhood," explains principal architect Thad Reeves, AIA. "Most homes here have long and skinny lots, with the short view facing the street. This lot is rotated the other way, with the long view facing the street. Plus, it has a 25-foot drop off the back of the property into a ravine."

While the lot is over 5,000 square feet, less than 30% of the land was feasible to build on, posing a challenge that would intimidate most developers. However, the A.Grupo team wanted to see this cliffhanger play out. Andrew Nance and Thad Reeves founded A.Grupo in 2005 with offices in Dallas and San Marcos. As a design and build firm specializing in modern builds, the team maintains sole control of the entire home-building process from con-

cept to construction. This level of control allows the team to execute complicated builds (like those perched on the edge of a cliff) with precise detail.

Utilizing the small footprint of the lot while maximizing the treetop views became a puzzle for the team. "We wanted to preserve the tree canopy and keep the home transparent and light," says Reeves. "However, we were also limited to building on the flat portion of the lot." The solution was to create a cantilevered design, suspending portions of the home over the edge of the cliff. "The ground floor footprint is only around 900 square feet. To make room for the parking pad, kitchen, living room, dining room and powder bath, we cantilevered the stairs and the deck off the back of the home," he explains.

While taking the home into the treeline was a practical choice, it also sparked an idea for breathtaking aesthetics. "It would have been impossible to build this home without connecting it back to the property," says Reeves. "The unique positioning in the treeline provides the perfect opportunity to



add natural connections and honor the landscape.” To tie the home back to nature, the A.Gruppo team designed expanses of glass positioned to make you feel like you’re in a tree-house. “The use of glass in the home is organized to reflect how you move through the property, composing views of the trees along the way,” adds Reeves.

Upon entering the home, visitors are greeted with a double-height entry drenched in sunlight from a two-story glass pane window. Suspended above is a small glass perch for taking in the view. “Other homes with double-height spaces like these typically have a balcony of sorts that allows you to look down into the space,” says Reeves. “We wanted to take people into that space, occupying the full volume and providing access to some of the best views in the home.” The glass floor detail of the perch can also be seen in the master bedroom and a hallway, tying together an open and airy feel. “The glass floors are made with one-inch-thick laminated tempered glass and are supported with custom steel frames designed to carry the load,” he explains. So, while this home feels like it is dramatically floating at times, it has a reinforced structure firmly anchored into the site.

In the living room, glass continues to serve as a connection to the outside. The open-concept living space features a wall of panoramic glass sliding doors that vanish when opened,



seamlessly connecting the indoor living space to the outdoors. “Because of the landscape of the lot,” says Reeves, “we couldn’t create a backyard space. Our solution was to install a sliding screen that essentially transforms the living room into a massive screened porch.”

The cantilevered staircase is bathed in a calming blue that references the sky framed above the trees by the full height, glazed wall. The upstairs contains the primary bedroom

suite, laundry, small office, two bedrooms and a Jack and Jill bathroom suite. Reeves says, “While this home is very modern, we also wanted it to feel warm. Instead of finishing all the walls in white, we opted for bold colors that highlight the architectural features and make the structure a form of art.” Vivid blues, warm pinks and sunny yellows give the home character and vibrance. The team also used vertical grain Douglas fir with a clear lacquer finish to add even more warmth throughout the modern home. “The tones of the cabinets, doors and trim work will change over time, becoming browner and

reflecting the changing landscape outside,” adds Reeves.

While this modern treehouse may look precarious at first glance, it is meticulously and thoughtfully anchored into the landscape — making for a happy cliffhanger ending. ♦

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