

Hands On

Modern architecture and bespoke details inform a ranch house northwest of Austin.

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For those traversing the road leading to the main house on this ranch northwest of Austin by day, sightings of eagles and hawks and of livestock dotting the spectacular landscape form just part of the experience. But the approach after sunset with views of the glowing interior lights affords another level of enchantment as visitors catch a glimpse of the dining room—wrapped on two sides with a grid of floor-to-ceiling windows—shining like a beacon in the distance. “There’s a lantern effect for guests coming around the hill from the southeast and arriving for a dinner party,” says architect Christopher Sanders, who worked with project manager Catherine Craig. For interior designer Laura Britt and her team’s part, they lit the space with a sleek, double-tier steel fixture as a complement to the window design. This would be just one of many moments inspiring the owners to describe their life in this home as “magical.”

No strangers to the region—the husband grew up going to a nearby lake house—the couple with four grown children purchased the 340 acres in 2014 and took their time determining the precise building locale. The eventual choice of spot near an outcropping of rocks resulted in the main structure being set on the side of a hill near the edge of a rocky slope. “The house captures broad views to the north and beautiful, more intimate views to the south,” says Sanders, whose design included a separate guesthouse situated to create a courtyard where the pool overlooks a valley. Mindful fenestration, most notably including French doors on one side of the living room as well as a hand-cranked kinetic wall on the other, guarantees a close connection to the surrounding vistas and allows the owners to draw prevailing breezes through the space on temperate days.

The homeowners’ desire for low-maintenance materials with a sense of place drove the selection of local sandstone and steel roof panels and shingles. “We wanted the house to be indigenous and to blend in,” explains the wife. Such sustainable choices eliminated concerns of needing to paint or

replace materials deteriorating in the harsh central Texas sun, and thanks to the efforts of builders David Wilkes and Catherine Wilkes the dry-stack stone walls seem to rise right out of the earth. “There’s an art to laying stone so that you don’t see the mortar,” says David, noting they did several mock-ups to achieve the requisite organic feel. “It’s especially difficult to create when workers are accustomed to laying everything straight and level, but we worked with a third-generation mason who knew exactly what to do.”

Inside, a strong, pared-down palette of concrete, steel and walnut suits the modern architecture. “The home is informed by the land and the earthy palette grew out of the colors of the stone and textural elements, like the lichen on the rocks,” says Britt. In the main living space, for example, the brown leather sofa mimics a tone in the dry-stack fireplace wall, as does the quartet of leather-wrapped drum light fixtures illuminating the exposed metal ceiling trusses. “Leather is a major player,” she adds. “The stitching detail on the back of the dining room chairs inspired the fixtures.”

There’s also a balance between smooth and textural moments, which is evident in the juxtaposition of the rough stone and polished-concrete floors in the main living areas, and in the main bedroom’s wood and steel on the bed frame contrasting with the assemblage of baskets on the wall. “There’s a large volume of space over the bed and placing a big painting there felt so expected,” explains Britt. “We wanted something more organic.”

That sense of quality and authenticity was a critical variable, and the home’s clean architectural lines are tempered by warm walnut kitchen cabinets designed to resemble furniture as well as hand-troweled plaster walls. In the main bathroom, a wood rod evoking the elegance of a ballet bar was crafted for hanging hand towels, and in the powder bathroom an exposed plumbing fixture “harkens back to the old days when you would find plumbing along the wall,” describes Britt. “The house is modern but it’s not intended to have a sleek machine feel—instead, it’s more bespoke and crafted and everything feels like it has a hand to it.” ■



Architect Christopher Sanders collaborated with KIB Architectural Services on the design of the living room’s hand-cranked kinetic wall fabricated by Drophouse Design and David Wilkes Builders. Polished concrete floors throughout are low-maintenance yet elegant.

Britt Design Group and Sanders designed the living room's leather-wrapped steel drum pendants by Warbach. A Century Roma sofa, Lee Relaxor swivel armchairs in Pindler fabric, Century Sonoma cocktail table and Arteriors Sycamore side table top a Kravet rug. Tony Saladino art from Gallery Shoal Creek hangs above the fireplace. Todd Campbell Studios fabricated the television stand.





Above: Flicht fabricated the painted millwork and steel cabinets in the bar area. The sink with a polished nickel Brizo faucet is set in Pietra Cardosa sandstone from Architectural Tile & Stone, and the window opening to the pool area was designed by Sanders in collaboration with KIB Architectural Services.

Opposite: Britt Design Group and Sanders designed the double-tiered rectangular dining room chandelier manufactured by Warbach. Latigo leather chairs with blackened aluminum frames from Croft House surround a custom table topped with a reclaimed wood slab sourced from the property. The rug is Kravet.

Sanders worked with David Wilkes Builders and expert mason Billy Joe King of BJK Masonry on the stone walls, arriving at an ashlar stack with rubble chinking. The guesthouse features Min lounge chairs from Point. MasterScapes, Inc. completed the landscaping around a pool designed by Sanders with input from Hample Pools & Service, LLC.





Above: Britt Design Group selected the powder bathroom's slate gray plaster wall finish by Imago Dei. The counter is fashioned from gray soapstone, and the faucet plated in an antique brass finish combines parts sourced by Sanders.

Opposite: African woven baskets from Townsend Provisions and a teak ladder from The Citizenry infuse the main bedroom with a bespoke feel. A Currey & Company lamp sits on a side table built into the metal-and-wood Arden bed from Croft House. Walls feature a custom plaster finish by Imago Dei.