



# HILL COUNTRY HAVEN

By MAURI ELBEL | Photography by JULIE NADER

**P**erched on top of a flat hilltop surrounded by oak trees and views that seem to stretch on forever, the Hodo family is now at home in their tranquil retreat nestled in the Texas Hill Country.

The couple was immediately drawn to their 20-acre lot sitting just west of Boerne in Estancia at Thunder Valley for several reasons: its close proximity to town, the neighborhood amenities and the 360-degree hilltop views. But uprooting their family of six from their established life in Houston required years of contemplation.

In the fall of 2012, they made the move from the bustling city to settle into their custom-designed, sprawling six bedroom,

seven bathroom home in the country. The Hodo's previous Houston residence was designed by Robert Dame, and they called on his skills once again to create a new home that would suit their growing family.

"We wanted to build a similar style house to what we built in Houston," says Lori Hodo. "Robert had researched the German architecture and the history of the Hill Country so with his knowledge and design brilliance, combined with our desires and tastes, we were always in sync with our ideas. We both wanted to build a house with specific elements and materials while creating a comfortable and livable home. Robert is such a creative visionary

and with his relaxed personality, it was so easy to work with him and Rollie O'Dell (project manager) during the design process."

Before ever pulling out his sketch pad, Dame unfolded his lawn chair on the property and spent the day surveying the wind direction, sun patterns and views to determine the best placement of the home to maximize these natural elements.

"This particular lot sits up high in the Hill Country — it appears to be the highest point between downtown San Antonio and Boerne," says Dame. "The beauty of this view is that it looks right toward the southeast part of downtown San Antonio. We wanted to direct this home to the southeast view, and it just so happened to be where the breeze was, too."

The residence's southeastern orientation capitalizes on breathtaking panoramas and rejuvenating breezes across the home — from the family room, study and master bedroom to the game room/theater area and loggia. On a clear night, the horizon sparkles with the lights and buildings of downtown San Antonio.

"From the beginning, this view remained a very important part in the planning process, and it turned out very well," said





Ray Stadler. “When you go up there and walk through the house you see all these cool views.”

Stadler Custom Homes worked with the Hodo family throughout the building process with project manager Gary Lundin proving to be flexible, accommodating and quick to take care of any issues that came up. “Building a home will test your sanity, and Gary was instrumental in keeping us relaxed and positive during the process,” says Hodo.

But it’s the home’s unique design that truly stands out — an amalgam of different architectural styles fused together. Borrowing from different vernaculars, Dame designed this home using a blend of styles ranging from elements of Texas Hill Country to the more traditional German influences historically seen in this region.

“They liked the Texas Hill Country look, but I did more of an interpretation of Texas Hill Country,” said Dame. “The design was influenced by some older buildings that were built in the 20’s near Kerrville called Camp Waldemar.”

Dame incorporated some of the German features seen in the historic buildings into the Hodo residence. Some obvious examples include the roofline pitches and the stonework that appears greater at the base before tapering upward.

“This home is really a hybrid of influence,” says Dame. “I have a tendency to be more free in my thinking and I will hybrid details together. The shingle-style architecture is common in the Northeast — it is not something typically seen in the Hill Country at all, but the beauty of the shingle is that I can form it and curve it and I can create shape.”

The home’s aesthetic also exudes a mountain lodge feel, inspired by generous beams used inside and out. All the interior and exterior woodwork, from the substantial Douglas fir, kiln-dried, time-worn beams seen on the outside to the reclaimed vintage oak floors inside, was installed by Terry Hurd and Don Gardner of Woodshop of Texas. While the installation was an exercise in effort and time, the clients say





it came together beautifully to form the central focal point of their home.

Another notable asset of this residence can be found in the children's separate spaces which reflect each child's individual character — spacious retreats with suite-like designs comprised of bedroom/bathroom/study configurations. A screened-in sleeping porch, featuring cots suspended on chains and walls made from reclaimed fencing, is perfect for sleepovers with friends. This screened sleeping porch is reminiscent of an old time tradition but provides a playful yet restful modern day space for the kids. The slate floors and knotty alder seen on the porch extend to the expansive guest suite, providing visitors ample space with a living room, bedroom, bathroom and coffee bar. Another fun element for the teenage children is the open-style game/theatre room — a more practical option for this family than a closed-theater concept.

The open spaces throughout the home are one of the elements the homeowners value most. The kitchen, breakfast and family rooms remain gathering spaces ideal for congregating and convening. The kitchen features a breakfast area and butler's bar, a Wolf® cook top and double wall ovens, a custom copper hood, Sub-Zero® refrigerator and freezer, and appliances paneled in rustic cherry cabinetry. With no detail overlooked, the kitchen is any chef's dream. But the versatility of the kitchen and adjoining rooms is the real asset for this family.

"We learned years ago that the kitchen is where people end

up gravitating to 90 percent of the time — not because of my cooking," says Hodo. "It just seems to be the central area when you have people over. We designed the kitchen, great room, dining area and breakfast room to be open to each other so people can mingle easily and congregate together without feeling left out in another room. You can be in the kitchen talking with someone while they are on the couch in the great room watching TV or to another person in the game room playing pool. We specifically wanted our game room downstairs to be tied into all the action and where we could keep the kids downstairs and in the open."

When the weather is nice, like it is most of the year, the Hodos can open up their interior living space and bring the outside in, creating an indoor/outdoor living environment with their Vista Pointe architectural door system. The main focal point inside the house is the cruciform ceiling in the family room, built from salvaged antique beams. The design, Dame says, is typically seen in churches rather than residential construction but one that captures the view to the southeast.

"When I design a family home, it is important to understand the family dynamics and cater the design to how the family works," says Dame. "And this home accomplished that — more so because it was the second home I had done for them so I strived to create the most ideal environment for them. These pieces work as a whole; each piece has to function at its highest."

From the intimacy of the master bedroom and elegance of the family room to the coziness of the breakfast room and





functionality of the kitchen, Dame says the expansive home flows together cohesively. Interior designer Susan Mangold helped achieve this through her thoughtful design selections.

“Our goal for this home was to create a space that reflected the warm, rustic feel of the Rocky Mountains using stone, brick, reclaimed timbers and reclaimed wood flooring,” says Mangold. “Each of these elements

contributes to the whole feel of the home.”

With four children in the house, the Hodo home is a hub of activity. But Mangold says she created different spaces for various activities while creating a warm, welcoming feel throughout the house by maintaining a balance through her use of color, texture, earthy materials and touches of Mother Nature.

“The high arches and masculine materials are balanced by the soft color and texture of the handmade rugs in the great room which show off the custom-made furnishings beautifully,” says Mangold. “We divided the great room into two areas. A conversation area in front of the fireplace is formed by four matching custom leather chairs. Each chair has a custom-made pillow that reflects the homeowners love of horses and riding. The remainder of the great room has a large, soft leather and fabric sectional and an oversized swivel chair made of a soft, textured chenille fabric. We chose soft textiles to balance the rough hewn feel of the architectural elements.”

Mangold also strived to capture individual personalities

throughout the home. Reflecting the homeowners’ personalities was easy, she says, because they were looking for a casual feel without being too rustic. The antler chandelier was a favorite brought from their previous home in Houston and was placed in the study to complement the various animal mounts and western art work.

“One of the challenges of this home was the toning down of the rustic elegance to give the two daughters a peaceful, serene space,” says Mangold. “All the colors of the home are the hues of nature. Once you enter the bedrooms and baths of the girls’ area you are greeted by a light, airy atmosphere. However, we did keep the rough hewn beams and stained doors to create a cohesiveness with the other part of the upstairs, which is where the boys bedrooms are as well as the sleeping porch.”

Through close, collaborative relationships, the homeowners, designers and builders worked together to create a peaceful, comfortable Hill Country haven that perfectly suits this large family’s busy lifestyle.

“When we walk into our house, it feels like this is where we are meant to be,” says Hodo. “My husband grew up in San Antonio so it’s a homecoming of sorts for him. We are very content and at home here now.” ❖

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