

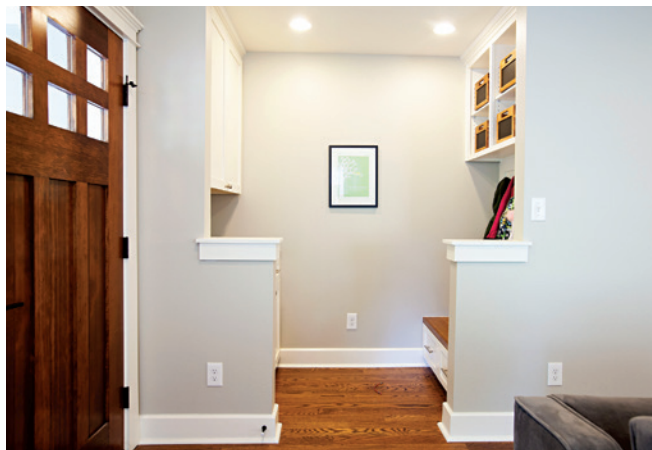
FIT FOR A FAMILY

By MAURI ELBEL | Photography by ELLIE FALCAO

Sometimes remodeling a house is the best way to get the home you've always wanted.



A walk through Ellie and Eric Falcao's revamped home in Central Austin's charming Rosedale neighborhood serves as a solid testament to this. Like many looking for the perfect abode in Austin, a city that welcomes more than 100 new residents daily, the search was a bit of a journey but one that proved well worth the steps the young family took to arrive home.



When the couple moved to Austin from Los Angeles in 2005, they were fresh out of college and purchased a builder home in South Austin located off of the traffic-riddled Manchaca Road. But after a few years and the arrival of their twins, the couple had a better grasp on where they wanted to raise their family in Austin.

“We wanted to try to become as central as possible,” says Eric Falcao. “We wanted a more urban lifestyle with a little more density and better schools.”

When it came time for the couple to search for homes, they scoured Central Austin. But they weren’t finding any homes within their price range that appealed to them — many of the homes that were large enough had piecemeal additions that didn’t make sense for their family.

“People were working with what they had and adding on where they could, but the homes just didn’t appeal to us,” says Ellie Falcao. “After a few months of looking and not finding anything that was move-in ready, we thought we should remodel our own.”

In May 2012, they stumbled on an adorable 1946-built, 1,200-square-foot, two bedroom, two bathroom Rosedale cottage. They immediately met with a builder to verify that a remodel would be within their budget, and they put an offer on the home the next day.

“We felt this home had potential,” says Ellie Falcao. “It was really cute, and we liked the street, too. It wasn’t a main thoroughfare like the one we backed up to before. We wanted somewhere our kids could play outside and ride their bikes and this street was tree-lined and perfect for that.”

“This house had all the right stuff for what we were envisioning in our minds — if we could pull it off,” adds Eric Falcao. “Out there, at least in brick and wood, we didn’t see anything we liked. So for us, it was easier to dream.”

The couple knew remodeling would be less expensive than tearing the house down and starting over — plus, the home possessed appealing qualities like the recently added master bathroom featuring contemporary black and white tile and a spacious shower. They began working with architect Paul DeGroot and builder Gary Zygmunt of Urban Home Builders to design and build their perfect home. Since time wasn’t of essence, they were able to lease the home in its current state for 18 months while they worked with DeGroot to finalize plans.

“We weren’t in a big rush — at that time our countdown was kindergarten,” says Ellie Falcao whose twins just turned five in May. “So we had time to rent it out while we worked with an architect and builder.”

DeGroot presented a series of design schemes to the Falcao’s, each containing various layouts before they arrived at what you see today: a 2,500-square-foot, four-bedroom, three-bathroom, two-story home.

“Option A is never what we will end up building; it’s just a starting point to throw darts at,” says DeGroot. “It all came

down to curb appeal and the floor plan, which always drives the boat. Option C maximized the upstairs space and had the most curb appeal while opening up the downstairs by relocating the stairs and moving the laundry room upstairs.”

Adding a second story created an ideal space for the twins. With two bedrooms, a shared bathroom, laundry room and designated common area above the stairs designed to grow with them over the years, the children use the area now to play with toys, watch movies and work on art projects while it can eventually be transformed into a study or game room space.

“We wanted rooms that could evolve naturally,” says Ellie Falcao. “We didn’t want to force spaces to be something they are not.”

DeGroot removed the dividing wall between the former living room and kitchen, which created a communal flow downstairs while facilitating a connection to the back yard which the home lacked before.

“Before we had to walk through the outside laundry room or through the master bedroom to get to the back yard, which just didn’t make sense with young kids,” says Ellie Falcao of the design that now features wrap-around windows in the kitchen to provide views to the adjoining screened porch bathed in natural light and the back yard where the kids play.

The Falcao’s previous home contained a laundry room they used as a drop-off spot for backpacks and belongings as they entered and exited through the garage. Without a garage or downstairs laundry room in their new home, they decided to build a drop-zone near their front door — a functional nook lined with built-in shelves, cabinets and hooks that duals as everyday storage as well as a place to charge phones and tablets.

Personal touches like this one are now the Falcao’s favorite part of their remodeled home. Their new master bedroom is a soothing suite boasting high windows that offer views of the treetops outside. A skylight was incorporated at the top of the stairs to funnel natural light into the centrally-located stairwell.

Ellie Falcao was at the helm of interior design decisions, gravitating toward light and airy colors seen throughout the home’s white trim (White Dove by Benjamin Moore), gray walls (Revere Pewter by Benjamin Moore) and beautifully veined Italian Carrara countertops in the kitchen.

The traditional detailing and craftsmanship seen on the trim and window frames mesh flawlessly with the home’s modern lines and contemporary flow — one of DeGroot’s favorite aspects of the remodel. Even with the upstairs addition, the home remains in tune with its Rosedale neighbors.

“The house just looks so much better now than it used to,” says DeGroot. “It’s got a lot more curb appeal now. A home that you can totally transform and improve is the best kind of project to work on.”

Throughout the remodel, the Falcao’s chose to splurge on the things that were most important to them — elements like the Weslock door knobs, Shaker-style two-panel solid wood doors



and handsome three-inch bed molding used as crown molding — and cut back on the areas that weren’t.

“For example, we wanted custom cabinets but the appliances were actually an area where we saved money because we knew they could be replaced down the road,” says Eric Falcao.

Protecting, restoring and refinishing the original red oak floors would have been just as costly as installing new flooring so they opted to keep the traditional wood as a sub floor, covering the boards with new three-inch, custom-stained red oak. Most of the lighting seen throughout the house is from Lighting Inc., but Ellie Falcao selected a few statement pieces like West Elm’s Glass Orb Chandelier that floats above the dining table.

Overall, the couple was pleasantly surprised at how simple the remodeling process was — construction began in August 2013 and they moved in March 2014.

“In hindsight, I feel really lucky,” says Eric Falcao. “This was

our first [remodel] project ever, and I am really glad we did it. You hear stories about remodels not going so well, and we just feel fortunate that it all seemed to go really seamlessly. But we had a good team — a great builder and architect.”

But what the family is enjoying most about their new home is that they’ve become a part of its story.

“This home has a history,” says Ellie Falcao. “A man stopped by the other day and told us his parents lived here for 50 years. His mom planted the ash tree that’s in our front yard. It’s really cool that our children will grow up here and we will all become a part of its history, too.” ❖

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