



URBAN HEIGHTS

This modern, three-level Travis Heights home rises above expectations with a central-orientation that is both compact and comfortable.

With a small downtown lot and the city's restrictive zoning ordinances, Element 5 Architecture principal Nick Mehl knew he faced a challenge when designing this modern three-level home tucked in Austin's eclectic Travis Heights neighborhood.

"We knew it would be difficult to get everything our clients wanted in this home," says Mehl of the 2,800-square-foot, three-bedroom, four-and-a-half-bathroom house complete with a basement guest space and roof deck. "But somehow we did."

When the Anderson family sold their 1930's craftsman-style Hyde Park home within

By MAURI ELBEL
Photography by TRE DUNHAM

a day of hitting the market, they were uncertain of their next step.

"We couldn't find a house on the market that met our needs and contemplated major renovation projects before landing on the idea of building, but we lucked into the lot and location," says Cindy Anderson of their centrally-located property just blocks from downtown.

While they were unsure of where or what their next house would be, what they envisioned was crystal clear. After sharing less than 1500 square feet of space with their two teenage children for years, the



family's main design goals included an open living plan, multiple entertainment areas, separate spaces for their son and daughter and a basement guest space where they can occasionally house a visiting band of musicians. After scouring design sites like Houzz and reading online reviews of Austin-area architects, Anderson was drawn to Mehl for his creative designs and environmentally conscious building ethic.

"After our first visit we knew that Nick was exactly the right professional for the project," she says.

With no time to waste, Mehl credits the fast design turn-around to his clients' clear goals, vision and direction which helped him to maximize everything they wanted on the tight site.

"The Anderson's clarity allowed them to get to the heart of what they wanted very fast," says Mehl. "They had a very clear program and direction for what rooms they wanted, how they wanted to use them and how they wanted those rooms to interact with the other spaces in the house. Because we were able



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to get very clear ideas from the beginning and they didn't waiver, it made the process that much easier."

The Andersons didn't have to search for a construction team; they called on local builder and friend Rob Clinchard who had completed numerous renovations on their previous home and had impressed them with his craftsmanship, professionalism and attention to detail. While their new home would be his first modern project, the Andersons say they

never doubted his ability to create what Cindy now refers to as "his finest masterpiece."

With a lot, builder and architect secured, the team got to work. Conceived to maximize the potential of its urban lot — measuring just 5,500 square feet — Mehl realized there was nowhere to go but up. Despite its modest footprint, the centrally-oriented home features free-flowing living spaces while capitalizing on their downtown and neighboring views.



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“We had to be super efficient in the way we laid out the house,” says Mehl. “The vertical circulation of the house is centralized, there are minimal hallway spaces, and in a 2,800-square-foot home, that orientation goes a long way.”

But in addition to efficiency, the home's central orientation also doubles as a passive cooling strategy, relying on a vertical chimney effect which allows heat to rise and escape through the highest point of the house: the roof deck.

“At the end of the day they can come home from work and flush out the house really quickly by opening that door — and the A/C has to work a little less hard during Austin summers,” says Mehl.

A commercial aluminum storefront window system is featured at the entry of the stucco and Hardie® siding house while large-scale windows featured throughout flood the home's interior with light. The home's brightness is enhanced by museum white walls and 10-foot ceilings, giving the impression of a much larger space. Anderson didn't hire a designer, rather she

thoughtfully selected finishes and furnishings that spoke to her family's musical interests and modern-meets-functional tastes.

“Admittedly I'm not an interior designer, however, I know what I like and don't and have become a die hard HGTV and DIY network enthusiast, veritable Houzz stalker and subscription owner of essentially every house and design-related publication available on the market or Internet,” she says.

Despite some initial skepticism about the decision to forego a professional, Anderson's well-thought out ideas and meticulously chosen furnishings and finishes are one of the home's strongest attributes. The family's musical interests are conveyed through an artistic display of their collection of acoustic and electric guitars, spaced along a canvas of blank white walls. Gray couches and black ottomans from Nest Modern and gray and red mid-century modern chairs from Five Elements Furniture create an eye-catching yet cozy seating area in the center of the living room.

From the smallest details to the most significant selections,

Anderson's design savvy is at play. The compact but high-traffic laundry area sports her favorite and most expensive tile selection at \$75 per square foot. She selected oil-rubbed engineered Navarre oak floors from Hardwood Bargains, a beautiful and forgiving choice in a home occupied by kids and pets. When she found out Navarre didn't manufacture the modern style of stair treads the design called for, she commissioned Clinchard and his team of carpenters to create matching treads on the open riser staircase which is now undeniably a key element of the home.

The contemporary and clean-lined aesthetic of the Anderson's custom-designed home was actually dictated by their unique dining table: an 8-foot by 4-foot custom piece crafted out of recycled metal from auto hoods by Weld House, a company based in Arizona. The sleek table seats 10 but doubles as the home's statement piece of artwork. Finding the perfect chairs to go with it took Anderson months, but she selected custom chairs with legs that featured the same metal finish, a wood back complementary of the Navarre flooring and an upholstery fabric that was comfortable, attractive and easy to clean from Five Elements.

“Aside from the table, which was ordered before the preliminary design stage, the other major influence to the architectural

design on the first floor was our interest in having a kitchen with commercial appliances, an open concept and little to no upper cabinets,” says Anderson. “The kitchen is the culmination of years of dreaming and planning for a commercial kitchen that allows my husband to indulge his passion for cooking and mine for baking.”

Exposed shelves, secret storage and floor to ceiling windows create a light, streamlined look in the kitchen punctuated by high-end appliances like the 60-inch Wolf® range featuring six burners, a flat-top grille and two full-size ovens. Anderson searched long and hard for a stylish, sophisticated countertop that no one else possessed until she finally found what she was looking for: a natural stone called “Silver Snake” that reminds her of the pattern of tree growth rings. The stone is featured on the countertops and waterfall island and contrasts brilliantly with Porcelanosa white tile backsplash that has a subtle texture that mimics tree bark. Together, the finishes work to bring the nature and numerous oak trees seen outside into the interior space.

This neutral yet modern palette continues throughout the house. Interlocking black and white tile pattern and solid Jadestone countertops provide a statement look in the master bathroom, complete with separate his and her vanity areas that



span 11 feet. In the basement bathroom, the Anderson's opted for a more industrial modern look with exposed plumbing and a stainless copper sink. The Anderson's children each contributed to the design of their own spaces.

"We knew from the beginning that with two teenagers who are four years apart and different genders, we needed two distinct spaces that allowed them to sleep, play, relax and bathe separately," says Anderson.

Their son's bedroom features a loft space — a special hideaway accessed by metal steps and handrails with a skylight out to the roof deck where he can relax with his iPad, a comic book or just revel in his own world. Their daughter's bedroom and bathroom space was designed to be a second master suite which will function as a guest space once she leaves for college in the fall.

The home's classic foursquare orientation paired with an unwavering devotion to its design proves how practicality and personal style can merge together to create a light and airy dwelling that speaks to a family's lifestyle and tastes.

"As soon as you walk in, this home just feels like a really easy place to live," says Mehl. ❖

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