



BUILDING BLOCKS

By **JULIE CATALANO** | Photography by **MARK MENJIVAR**

For some, a spacious corner lot might seem ideal for a massive, monolithic structure to occupy the available space. But the young clients of Dado Group's principal architect, Kristin Hefty, had something else in mind: a unique residence that would lead multiple lives - as a private respite, gathering place and haven for overnight guests. The result was a creative collaboration that was definitely out of the box.





Hefty, with the San Antonio design and build firm, started with the homeowners' wish list. "Listening to them and the way they live, we conceived an area that was a large public space for family and entertaining, one that was a private retreat for our clients and their children and a separate space for housing guests." These became the three basic elements of the project — living area, bedrooms and guests' quarters — explains Hefty, who worked with in-house project designers Luis Vargas and Ryan Schmidt on the custom home north of San Antonio.

"Our design intent was to break up the massing of the structure to better integrate the home to the site," says Hefty. "We wanted to design to an intimate scale that would be more sensitive to the neighborhood." The clients particularly wanted a

low-profile design that would blend in with the existing historic nature of the neighborhood, and loved the block idea as long as it did not overpower the surrounding scale.

Hefty's stylish linchpin was a glass-enclosed entryway with a raw steel staircase that spanned the home's two levels and subtly tied everything together. "It was designed to make it look like it was joining two structures already on the lot," says David Mills, owner of Mills Custom Homes in New Braunfels. The use of low-e (low emissivity) glass in the stairwell and throughout the house effectively insulates without sacrificing natural light. "The air conditioning in that entryway space rarely kicks on," says Mills. The staircase — along with all of the indoor and outdoor steelwork — was treated with Penetrol "to give it a patina and prevent rusting," says Mills.



The 5,556-square-foot brick and wood home also features Hardie® siding, with an architecturally inspired twist. "There's a piece of Z flashing in between each piece to give more definition to the siding and make it different from your typical Hardie siding job," says Mills. Old Texas brick was sourced at Brick Selections in San Antonio. The roof is a Kynar 500 painted metal roof in charcoal. Protective overhangs of wood and steel that Hefty calls "eyelids," funnel light to the interior from the sides and from the unique cupola that extends across much of the main living area. Exterior wood beams were made of Douglas fir stained with Sikkens Hazelnut stain, and the steel beams were custom made by Holt Contracting in New Braunfels.

Unquestionably the centerpiece of the L-shaped floor plan is an impressive great room, where the eye is drawn upwards





to an even more impressive wood ceiling, which was not without its challenges. “We had trouble finding a truss company that would manufacture them,” says Mills, “so they were custom designed, engineered, and built on site, then lifted in with a crane.” The interior Douglas fir wood beams were also stained with Sikkens Hazelnut like the exterior ones. In between the beams, the pine tongue-in-groove was stained with Sikkens Cape Cod.

The great room flows seamlessly through the dining area and into the bright, airy kitchen. Stainless steel countertops nicely complement the crisp look of the kitchen island made of quartzite from Delta Granite in San Antonio. Generous lower drawers and cabinets provide ample storage, including on the kitchen island where tools and supplies are close at hand. The noticeable absence of upper kitchen cabinets was the homeowner’s idea, admitting he has an aversion to clutter. Instead, floating shelves

made from the same material as the floors — eight-inch hickory with a natural sealant — grace either side of the sink.

Wood plays a major role in this house as there is not a speck of sheetrock — all of the walls are #2 pine, either painted or sealed. Hefty calls it “one of the house’s coolest features” and one that came about by chance: the homeowners had visited a friend’s renovated farmhouse with all wood walls and decided that sheetrock-free was the way to go.

That decision turned into a painstaking and time-consuming job, but well worth it, says Mills. “Normally you would sheetrock to the edges of the door jamb and then have casing to cover the gap between the door and the sheetrock.” Without casing, “we ran all of our shiplap just up to the edge of the jamb. It was a nice architectural detail that took a lot of precision.” It also had a practical aspect to it, he adds. “With wood there’s no patching or repairing like with sheetrock. If you’re moving furniture and run into the walls, the dents just add character to the wood.”

Although most of the home’s interior wood walls are painted, the light-filled garage apartment features a whimsical reversal: the oak floors are painted, and the walls are left natural with

only a clear sealant. From an overall design standpoint, says Hefty, the “wood really warms up the house,” putting to rest the myth that a modern style home is cold or uncomfortable. “You can have clean lines and be simple and different and still be comfortable.”

The exterior palette of natural colors also adds warmth and creates a smooth transition between inside and outside. The lot itself evokes a country ambience, although maneuvering around a massive oak tree and other existing foliage presented challenges to the design and construction. In addition to patches of manicured lawn, a landscape designer worked in native bushes, shrubs and trees for an almost wild look that helps to blur the lines between the home and the site. A charmingly rustic hog wire and Douglas fir fence encircles the front part of the home; the back fence is made of cedar.

For outdoor entertaining, Hefty and the homeowners came up with a way to maximize the yard’s small size. Double doors in the garage — opening on one side to the driveway, and on the other side to the backyard — allows them to simply back out the cars, close the driveway side, open the other end and create a “covered patio” that cleverly extends the outdoor living space.



To say that the homeowners are thoroughly enjoying their new surroundings is an understatement. “The house absolutely met our expectations,” they say. One nice surprise was the masterful lighting by lighting designer Joe Kaplan of Texlights, Inc. and the ability to “subtly adjust to just about any circumstance. Joe is a ninja.” Recalling their original wish list item to “make guests feel like they had the best room at the inn,” has proven to be more than successful. “Our friends and family almost always stay a day or two longer than they’d planned.” ❖

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