



SOUTH TEXAS HACIENDA

MODERN-DAY RANCH RETREAT
BUILDS UPON FORD'S
FUNDAMENTAL DESIGN CONCEPTS

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Stretched out along the side of a plateau, views from this timeless hacienda situated on a sprawling South Texas ranch extend into Mexico as far as the eye can see.

Sited close to another outcropping to fit within the existing landscape while retaining southern panoramas across 20 miles of undeveloped land, the design concept of this ranch retreat was built upon the underlying philosophies of O’Neil Ford, the renowned 20th century American architect and founder of Ford, Powell & Carson.

“The reason I am at this firm and have been here for 32 years

is because of the craftsmanship and respect for scale which are some of O’Neil’s ideas,” says John Gutzler, principal at Ford, Powell & Carson. “We had a large site to work with and could have put the house anywhere, but we chose to maximize the views by placing the house into the hill rather than on top of the hill which also allows southeast cooling breezes to flow across the building as a form of natural ventilation and cooling.”

The project serves as another example of Ford’s fundamental design concepts regarding siting buildings in relation to the landscape, creating indoor and outdoor relationships within

a building and incorporating exceptional craftsmanship, explains Gutzler.

Designed as a getaway retreat for clients who wanted a place to escape with friends and family, the 5,000-square-foot house is composed of private and public spaces arranged in a row of individual buildings linked by outdoor spaces.

Three separate master suite pods provide privacy for their occupants, each featuring individual courtyards wrapping bathrooms equipped with outdoor showers and garden spaces. Each one has a private porch, situated to take advantage of the

views and cooling breezes with an effort to extend the interior living spaces outdoors. A separate bunk room provides extra sleeping space while the entry, living area and kitchen serve as the active zone of the home.

“The clients are very complimentary of the design because it allows them to have guests but still maintains some sense of privacy while allowing them to all get together in the active areas,” explains Gutzler.

Largely inspired by Gutzler’s travels throughout Mexico, Cuba and Europe, this hacienda projects an old world feel.



And by keeping the scale intimate, Gutzler says the home gives the impression of a compound — a structure that was added on to over time.

“We wanted a house that looked like it had been there forever,” says Gutzler. “So many times people want these homes with huge high spaces, but we kept this home very intimate. Part of O’Neil’s philosophy was to have a sense of human scale and to employ craftsmanship throughout the building. Overall, I think this house really fits the site and expresses the idea of old world Mexico and Texas in the craftsmanship and simple regional materials that were incorporated into it.”

Following suit with the firm’s founding concepts, Gutzler says the project remains a celebration of craftsmanship and simple details. From the millwork done by Alan Reams and the wood floors crafted by Carl Fite of San Marcos to the Luminario light fixtures and custom carved doors by Denise Kocurek of San Antonio, thoughtful touches and real elements dominate the design.



“In building this, we made a special effort to deal with the individual craftsman and to respect them so that we got something special,” says Gutzler. “All these factors came together to create a handmade, one-of-a-kind product.”

Examples of superior craftsmanship are found throughout the hacienda. Load-bearing walls clad with heavy plaster are finished with special details such as rounded corners that appear worn — reminiscent of an old church in Mexico. The plaster work, by Richardson Tile out of Lampasas was specially crafted with slight shifts in color drawn from the surrounding landscape in natural shades of sage, gray, silver and off-white. Saltillo tile from Mexico features custom bullnose edge details that engage low across the walls on the interior and exterior. Dense Sugarloaf stone, sourced from Sugarloaf Mountain, is seen on the top of the plaster walls and surrounding the multiple fireplaces found throughout the house. Executed by Stonescapes of San Antonio, the stonework speaks to the look of natural stone found near the site. All doors, wood flooring, millwork and timber came from a single source of old-growth long leaf pine to create a cohesive, solid look. Custom hammered light fixtures placed at eye level are supplemented with more contemporary lighting to properly light each space while keeping the focus on the handmade elements.

“A lot of times these days, you put a project out to bid and you get what you get,” says Gutzler. “But when you have a good working relationship between the owner, architect and the contractor, you can truly build something special.” ❖

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ABOUT O’NEIL FORD

(1905-1982)

The firm’s founding partner, O’Neil Ford, is largely regarded as the most influential Texas architect of the twentieth century. Born in Pink Hill, Texas, Ford came to San Antonio in 1939 as an architect for the National Youth Administration. Working with the San Antonio Conservation Society, he directed the restoration of historic La Villita on the banks of the San Antonio River. The early postwar years of Ford, Powell & Carson’s practice were characterized by innovative designs for solar houses using natural ventilation and calculated shading. The firm designed primary and secondary schools during the postwar era and participated in the explosive growth of university education starting with the design of Trinity University in 1948. While design for higher education remains a major specialty of the longstanding firm, other specialty areas include residential design, planning and urban design, religious architecture, theatre and assembly space design, historic preservation and interior design. Numerous local iconic buildings including the Tower of the Americas, the Alamo and the Spanish colonial missions, the Urban Segment of the Museum Reach of the River Walk and San Fernando Cathedral were designed or restored by the firm.
