



TRANQUIL TRANSFORMATION

By MAURI ELBEL | Photography by NICK JOHNSON

There was only one problem: the 1980's-built house sitting on the site which came with a slew of drawbacks ranging from an unappealing exterior, clad in wood siding and painted battleship gray with bright red trim, to clunky detailing, inelegant proportions and arched windows. "From the exterior, your heart sank when you drove up to it," says Philip Keil of Furman + Keil Architects. "It was not attractive at all. Then inside, the walls and materials were really dark — almost black — and sponge painted with bronze gold. It had very small windows which had the effect of sucking all the light out of the house. It was just dismal."

When work brought a couple from California to Austin, they landed on a one-of-a-kind property on Lake Austin — a private peninsula surrounded by sparkling water and uninterrupted vistas.

But as this renovation proves, the ability to look past the problems and see the potential for what could exist resulted in a home every bit as spectacular as the site it sits on.

"An early mantra that helped to inform almost every design decision was to allow spaces to interact with this amazing site and take advantage of the uniqueness of each view," says Gary Furman.

The property, a unique peninsula surrounded on three sides by water sitting across from Laguna Gloria, is graced with uninterrupted views of the peaceful lake and a sense of privacy due to its lack of immediate neighbors. Because the existing home was grandfathered under more lenient setback restric-



Working largely within the constraints of the remodel, reusing the existing slab and a large percentage of exterior wall structure, Furman + Keil Architects' redesign of the 5,890-square-foot Lake Austin home dramatically opened up the house to the surrounding lake. Collaborating with a talented team that included interior designer Fern Santini, builder Dagleish Construction Company, Mark Word Design and engaged homeowners, the project went from clunky and cluttered to contemporary and clean-lined.

"The original house was composed of a series of small rooms," says Furman. "By restructuring the roof framing with long span steel beams, we were able to remove all of the interior walls in the main public areas of the house, resulting in an open floor plan. Spaces are discretely delineated from one another with a series of free-standing cabinets which never reach the ceiling."

Furman says the result is a complex series of interacting spaces in which the extents of rooms are kept purposely vague.

"One of the big things Gary and I discussed early on was the idea of changing the scale of that living room to take advantage of the amazing site," says Keil. "The solution was to divide the space and create a screen porch on the south portion and a living room on the north portion. That sort of started this process of opening the house to engage much more with the landscape and amazing lakeside setting."

Before, walking from the oversized living room to the exterior pool deck was an abrupt experience. Now, the serene screened porch creates a subtle transition from the indoors to the outdoors, connecting the home to the surrounding landscape. Pan-

oramic windows and floor-to-ceiling sliding glass doors reinforce the connection.

The courtyard was redesigned to allow visitors to penetrate deeper into the site through an extended entry sequence that creates a more intimate, peaceful experience. The adjacent garage was transformed into a carport and art studio that opens up to the entry courtyard. Before, as visitors approached the house, they were greeted with the sight of bright red garage doors. But by simplifying and decluttering the entry courtyard, pulling the glass-surrounded dining room to the front of the house and converting the garage into a carport, the lake becomes the focus from the very beginning.

"The goal was to achieve a sense of arrival, serving as a transition to the refinement found once inside," says Furman.

The exterior was re-clad in understated stucco while steel shading devices, exposed structure, and fenestration add visual prominence and anchor the home to the landscape. Replacing the busy wood cladding with stucco declutters the appearance of the house with simplified, smooth lines. The backside of the carport is clad in raw copper with one corner left open to allow a small peek of the lake. Raw copper is repeated in various spaces throughout the house such as the kitchen vent hood and backsplash, exterior window framing and screened porch fireplace — serving as what Keil describes as jewelry against an otherwise neutral palette. Replacing the previous roof with a thinner, more elegant profile adds a rhythm and level of detail signature of the firm's work.

Open spaces, ample use of glass and bright white tones maximize the diffusion of natural light throughout the house — the



tions, which had increased dramatically since the house was built, the decision was made to remodel rather than tear down and start fresh.

"It would have been a great house to tear down and rebuild, but with all the zoning laws governing this piece of land, the homeowners would have been left with a postage stamp size of land they were allowed to build on," says Keil. "It made it undevelopable as new construction. That was the genesis of the remodel — by keeping the bones of the original house, the homeowners were able to rebuild a house that met their needs."



kitchen, for example, is a glass-surrounded space flooded with natural light that glimmers against quartz countertops and bright white cabinetry.

“We took inspiration from an existing kitchen skylight to fashion a new window wall that folds into a skylight,” Furman says. “Constructed of bent steel with mahogany trim, the glass extends directly to the countertop, enhancing the connection from interior to exterior.”

Inside, Santini curated a contemporary style that celebrates the home’s setting and blurs the distinction between the indoors and outdoors with a simple material palette of indigenous limestone, rift sawn white oak flooring and copper, and a subtle, creamy backdrop punctuated with fun elements such as playful pendants and surprising textures.

“The idea was to celebrate the setting, keep the atmosphere lighthearted and casual, but artful — to not deliver the expected,” says Santini. “The furnishings provide a neutral backdrop for art and entertaining — they’re a mix of styles and periods so they’ll never date themselves.”

One of Santini’s favorite features is the hanging bed on the screened porch. “I had wanted to do one forever and finally had a client agree,” she says. “Now it’s everyone’s favorite spot.”

Whether relaxing on the screened porch or in any other delightfully revamped space in the house, it’s evident that this home is finally worthy of the spectacular property it sits on.

“It is a house you would want to live in,” says Keil of the remodel. “It is refined without being precious. It is a very relaxing space. Your heart rate slows down a couple of notches as soon as you walk in there.” ❖

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