



DIVING INTO MODERNISM

A modern lake house
with familiar roots

By MAURI ELBEL | Photography by DROR BALDINGER

In today's world of design blogs and Pinterest boards, it's rare clients hire an architect without immediately handing over a stack of carefully curated examples conveying exactly what they envision their new home to be.



When a retired couple, Janie and Pat Sullivan, approached Mark Odom of Mark Odom Studio to design a home on their three-acre property on Lake Waxahachie, they simply asked for a modern house that was different from any of the traditional homes they'd lived in before. Then they gave his studio, which also designed the interiors and landscaping, complete freedom to put their architectural creativity to work.

"The clients are old family friends I have known since I was young," recalls Odom who grew up in Waxahachie. "I didn't anticipate the clients pushing us in terms of approaching a more contemporary layout and format, but they were looking for something more modern and exploratory which was a great surprise. They were very hesitant to tell us exactly what they wanted because they didn't want it to interfere with

what we would come up with, which is kind of atypical in this age when we are used to hundreds of images coming at us."

But allowing Mark Odom Studio to have total creative control resulted in a stunning modern lake house that grabs views of serene Lake Waxahachie from every single room. Considering the Sullivan's lifestyle as well as site orientation and climate conditions, the 5,700-square-foot, six-bedroom, four-bathroom home situated on Lake Waxahachie runs parallel to the water, maximizing panoramas of the surrounding landscape with ample windows and balconies that funnel natural light throughout the home.

"I love the location of this house and the way it sits on the lot," says Janie of the home she shares with her husband, Pat, who served as general contractor for the project with the help of his friend and fellow contractor, Skip Noel. "It is really





“The home also has two master suites which provides an overnight guest with a feeling of having their own special personal space.”

The Sullivan’s have deep country roots and were used to living on wide-open land so Odom’s design concept revolved around a modern interpretation of a barn intended to offer a vague familiarity of the past.

“Even though it turned out as a modern house, it was interesting to try to find some common vernacular that I thought represented who the owners are — some component or history that I knew they could recognize,” says Odom. “This was their first dive into modernism. And sometimes modernism can be cold and a very different lifestyle. To insert that into someone’s life, point-blank, can be harsh. So I tried to find a link into their past that could be comforting.”

The concept began with diagramming the clients’ programmed rooms while creating a volume and a repetitive wood structure that recalled a barn, explains Odom of the axial plan that stretches out along the long and narrow sliver of land that sits atop a hill. While a barn remains the underlying design element, it’s not something one would detect from first glance. Rather, the barn reference remains subliminal, a structural frame built with glulam beams which extend from the interior to the exterior, remaining prominent in certain areas of the house while disappearing in others.

The home’s exterior is a marriage of gray Texas limestone, white stucco and cedar, with a metal roof and a steel trellis that shades the refreshing lap pool running along the back side of the house. Since the home became more externally expressive than anticipated, Odom says an effort was made to ensure the interior spaces remained simple, comfortable and connected with the outdoors.

Natural light pours into the home through a continuous bank of windows located on the top and bottom floors which is enhanced by the diamond plaster finish on interior walls and ceilings. Strand bamboo floors feature a natural finish, which meshes well with glossy exposed aggregate concrete floors. Flat wooden cabinets in the kitchen and bathrooms are painted a solid gray and appear almost as a single surface, further simplifying the interiors.

“It just feels very clean and organized,” says Janie. “It is much more calming and less cluttered than our other houses.”

The studio — a second-story space above the garage featuring an external entry that connects with the main house via an exterior catwalk — was an additional component that evolved as the house grew. The separate space, containing an office, bathroom and large antique marble top table where Janie makes jewelry and quilts, allows works-in-progress to remain messy without cluttering the rest of the home. Another interesting element that organically evolved during construction was the opportunity to use a leftover piece of glulam to create a bathroom countertop.



open and airy and peaceful. There are so many windows that, whether I am in my studio or the exercise room or any of the bedrooms, we have a view of the lake. We don’t even have curtains on most of the windows. It feels very private; like we are out there by ourselves.”

Odom’s initial goal was to understand the clients’ interior and exterior wish list along with their lifestyle while creating a modern vernacular that takes advantage of the lake views and surrounding natural landscape. The client’s existing home lacked transparency, an objective which guided the new design.

“Transparency was the biggest thing they were after,” Odom says. “They wanted their entire family to be able to see and hear each other from different areas of the house.”

The design now allows people to remain connected inside of the house, even when they aren’t standing in the same space. This proves especially useful during large family gatherings — the couple has six children, their spouses and a combined 13 grandchildren — so even when it’s just immediate family getting together, there is more than enough room to accommodate an additional 25 people.

“There is room for everybody,” says Janie of the open floor plan that allows the family to remain connected while maintaining a degree of separation between interior rooms for an added level of privacy.



“It was a nice touch at the very end,” says Odom. “Because the owner was also the builder, there was an opportunity to stop and pause and create something a little different than we had originally planned.”

And while the home’s size increased substantially, becoming much bigger than originally anticipated, it doesn’t feel too large when you are standing inside.

“The house is comfortable in terms of the scale and connections,” says Odom. “Once you are in it, it doesn’t feel like an almost 6,000-square-foot house. It is more about the placement and the orientation and the views and the experience.”

The landscape, comprised of native, drought-hardy plants selected for their ability to sustain the harsh heat and climate, also works to create visual buffers for added privacy around the home. From the interiors to the exteriors and all around, this home is a clear response to its owners and the site it sits on, proving that coming to the table without an exact vision can sometimes lead to something better than could have been imagined.

“It is rare for a client to put themselves in our hands entirely,” says Katie Bingham, principal architect. “It is a fun opportunity being able to push ourselves, educate a client and design without any true boundaries from the beginning. To trust the office to come up with a design that would meet their needs without any requirements was really special.” ❖

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