



RUSTIC AND REFINED

By MAURI ELBEL | Photography by DANIEL NADELBACH

On 600 wooded acres just over an hour outside of Houston in a dot of a town called New Ulm, a rustic ranch house serves as a rural escape for a city-dwelling family.





While weekdays are spent immersed in Houston’s busy bustle, weekends for the couple and their two children tick on a bit slower on Rancho Sin Nombre (Spanish for “ranch with no name”), an idyllic rural swath of land with plenty of trees, a few lakes and chickens, donkeys and longhorns. The couple purchased the land two decades ago, but their 4,500-square-foot rustic retreat evolved from years of contemplating exactly what they wanted and needed.

“Their original intention was to just build a pool,” says architect Rick Burleson of Burleson Design Group who worked with the clients a few years prior to design a skeet range. “But ultimately, they came to the conclusion that they wanted a house as well. One nice thing about working with clients

who have owned the property for a long time was that they were familiar with the land and had a great idea of how they wanted to use it.”

Interested in a ranch home that gravitated toward a more rustic aesthetic, the couple sought out Burleson Design Group which has designed individual residences and large family compounds on ranches all across Texas.

“They wanted a design that was rustic and durable and appropriate to a ranch,” says Burleson. “But they were also really interested in designing something that would relate to the existing party barn. They wanted to find the right balance — a facility that felt welcoming, something that was relatable and very open.”

Rustic yet refined, the country compound serves as a

weekend retreat for the family of four and their frequent guests, but it was also designed with the future in mind. The design was born out of several objectives: to capture a view of their picturesque lake to the west, orient the structure to the prevailing southeast breezes, and open the outdoor living areas to the existing party barn south of the site to create a communal outdoor living space.

“The overall design sprang from the idea of creating a dominant building in the form of a stone-gabled great room,” says Burleson. “This is my favorite part of the architecture — it was the starting point of the distinctive design.”

Embodying heavy limestone massing, reclaimed sand-blasted wood ceilings and a Hope’s steel frame window system, the transparent room ushers in views of the lake, pool



and pavilion, tying all of the site's primary features together. Designed to capture views from both sides, the indoor spaces connect with the surrounding environment. The lower scale bedroom wings extend from the main gabled building in an "L" shape to define the pool court, while a detached pavilion creating the third leg to form an open-face "U" that surrounds the shared communal outdoor living space, undeniably the heart of the residence.

"When designing for ranches, I have learned that it's im-

portant to position the elements — buildings and walls — in a way that creates defined and protected outdoor areas," says Burlison. "I think this compound has such a comfortable outdoor living area — it's a very enjoyable setting."

The proportion and detailing of the building were driven by ranch-appropriate architecture on the interior as well as the exterior. Reclaimed rustic wood, limestone, metal, lower roofs with shed pitches and stained concrete floors are fluid throughout the design, creating a cohesiveness between the

inside and outside, and a feeling of durability and permanence throughout.

The main three-bedroom home shares a single living area and a media room, designed to accommodate the family when it is just the four of them and provide a timeless configuration that will accommodate the couple once they are empty nesters. The master bedroom is on the opposite side of the house from the pool, providing a view of the lake while buffering the homeowners from pool noise and activity. Three guest

bedrooms are connected to the main house by the roof but separated by a carport element which forms the base of the U-shaped structure. The guest suites, configured similarly to a hotel, each have their own bathrooms for a greater sense of privacy but can also be accessed from the pool deck which creates a shared communal experience once they walk outside.

"They like to entertain their friends and family there a lot," says Burlison. "That was a big driver for the design — being able to accommodate large groups."

The pavilion wrapping the pool features an outdoor kitchen with a large serving bar and sink, grill and pizza oven, a large covered lounge and dining area with a support kitchen equipped with a sink, dishwasher, extra refrigerators and additional prep and storage space, making it as convenient as possible to entertain large groups.

"That support kitchen was an idea they had which I hadn't seen before," says Burlison. "But they had been entertaining for 20 years and knew what was needed."

Burlison gives credit to the clients and interior designer Darla Bankston May for collaborating on various interior



details and selections — a collaboration the architect says yielded refined counterpoints to the otherwise rustic architecture. For example, the built-in niches with painted bead board in the great room creates a space for the owners to display some of their keepsakes while providing an elegant contrast to the stone and exposed woods, and the starry night ceiling that twinkles like a Texas sky above the media room adds an appropriate touch of whimsy. Lighting details come into play in several areas throughout the house, from the LED lights embedded under the kitchen island that create a nice yet subtle indirect light source below the reclaimed oak counter island, to the fun exterior sconces featuring colorful marbles embedded into the faces.



“It was a great multi-year collaboration between client and architect to create this centerpiece compound for Rancho Sin Nombre,” says Burleson. “It’s a retreat where the house functions well on an intimate scale when it is just their immediate family, but then it also has this capacity for entertaining large crowds with the pool and pool court and outdoor area and guest rooms.” ❖

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