

AT THE MERGER OF ART AND NATURE IS DESIGN

By Cheryl Van Tuyl Jividen | Photography by Dror Baldinger

Nestled in a Hill Country chasm in Vanderpool sits an artist's modern workspace, Box Canyon Studio. The context-sensitive studio is big on design, function and inspiration. Patzy Halliday, a ceramicist and painter, had an important request of architect Tobin Smith: to give her the feeling of working outside, even when she was inside.



Smith took thoughtful measures to ensure the ideal location while maximizing the spectacular views. "It was critical to be on site to find the perfect spot to nestle this little structure in relation to the man-made and God-made context. On those early visits to the property, I was locating trees, gauging distance to the main house, considering possible floor elevations, and calibrating the view angle

down the canyon while creating the initial sketches. Patzy's husband Ken had carefully studied the area and passed along his knowledge of sun angles and the direction of the prevailing breeze, which were also factored into the siting and design of the studio," says Smith.

Halliday wished to be physically close to the main house, but emotionally separated from it. In response, Smith's attentive consideration created a destination for concentration and



inspiration. The studio sits nearby, but nearly hidden from the main house with a descending stone path that bends around filtering foliage before revealing the studio's projecting roof plane. "This short procession to a singular space serves to cleanse the mind and allow her to enter a different realm of thought," says Smith.

The studio is set into the hillside, which helps minimize the scale on the upper road side of the structure and allows the view side to open directly to grade. It also addresses the environmental conditions with a projecting wall and roof planes that shield the glass from direct sun while funneling southeastern wind into the space. Smith explains, "Patzy wanted the option to 'work outside' with a roof over her head and doors and windows open, but when it's blazing hot or breezeless, she can turn on the wall-mounted, mini-split air conditioner and still have the expansive view. The

breeze does the job most of the time. It funnels down the canyon through the studio's big operable doors and out the high clerestory windows on the opposite wall."

Relating to the setting, the material choices were imperative to the studio's aesthetics, but also driven by cost and durability. "There is a corrugated barn on the other side of the main house. It seemed prudent to use the same material for this satellite structure so that the outbuildings, though very different, would connect on some level. Corrugated metal is common for utilitarian buildings in the Hill Country — sheds, barns, goat houses, etc. Given the small scale and rural location of this studio, those buildings were the precedents." The selections, including concrete, hot-rolled steel, galvanized metal and composite panels, utilized for both the exterior and interior, allow the workspace to be hosed-down during occasional cleanings. The only paint used on the project was red primer, left uncovered on a steel column. The restrained palette is completed with an exterior-rated, glulam beam cantilevering beyond the column. But the colors will evolve, says Smith, "The various metals will oxidize or dull with exposure to the elements and the composite panels will stain, scratch and spot like saddle leather, adding the story of time and use."

Just beyond the outdoor kiln, a wall of firewood is an ideal gathering place, and bathed in an amber glow is a fire pit with seating. "With the wood-based panels lining the interior, the building emits warmth at night akin to a large campfire, giving it a reassuring nocturnal presence in this isolated box canyon," says Smith. A place of nature, design and art. ♦



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