

# ORGANIC MODERNISM

By Claudia Alarcón  
Photography by Clay Grier

*Built in 1955, this mid-century ranch house in Austin's Zilker neighborhood was characterized by its low-slung roof, brick exterior and pitched ceilings, and had not been renovated or maintained in sixty years. That changed with a creative collaboration between Austin's Mark Ashby Design and Rick + Cindy Black Architects, and the vintage home underwent a complete renovation and remodel.*





when you walk in,” she states. Behind this slat wall is where they added most of the storage as well as the appliances and coffee station, well hidden from the rest of the home.

The homeowners wanted the kitchen to be an entertaining space, but also a family space that didn’t feel too modern. “The word modern can often be used to describe some of the more cold, contemporary designs,” says Simon. “But if you take it back to its truest form, it describes a sense of cleanliness and materiality that was first embraced during the mid-century. This house was begging for a mid-century modern kitchen, but we needed to make sure that it was warm and inviting.”

To accomplish this request, the team decided to investigate organic modernism. Because they increased the amount of natural light with the addition of larger windows, they were able to design the custom cabinetry in white oak without it feeling too heavy. The cabinetry customization by AR Lucas Construction is enviable says Simon. “We had total freedom and flexibility. Every drawer and cabinet were made to our exact specification, and the way the drawer and cabinet lines harmonize is also a big win.” For the backsplash, they incorporated tile with a natural glaze by Bedrosians in the color River. “These elements all add warmth to the space,” says Simon. “And the natural movement in the materials give the kitchen a more relaxed, imperfect sense of ease that can get lost in more abrasive lines and angles of what can also be called modern.”

The integrated oak hardware on the cabinets will withstand the test of time and trend, and the Fire Brush Absolute Black Granite countertop adds a beautiful look of contrast and texture. “The design goal with this open kitchen was to highlight the beauty of the materials used — primarily rift sawn white oak and Absolute Black Granite,” says Rick Black, of Rick + Cindy Black Architects. “Views of the appliances and plumbing fixtures from other parts of the house are limited, to create a more serene quality overall.” Appliances include a professional grade, stainless steel Thermador Pro Harmony® gas



range, a Kitchenaid® vent hood with LED task lights, and under the counter stainless steel icemaker and refrigerator.

“The challenge with mid-century ranch houses is that the interiors can often be a little dark and confining with long hallways, low ceilings and high window sills. This house was no exception so we lightened up a lot with the floor, paint scheme and reconfiguring of the walls and windows. The balance to the gloss of the floors and the white of the walls is the warmth of the kitchen,” says Rick Black. ♦

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Overall, Mark Ashby Design added terrazzo floors throughout and worked with Rick and Cindy Black to completely redesign the 273-square-foot kitchen, sunken den and bathrooms while keeping the home’s original mid-century charm. When it came to the kitchen design, however, the team encountered a few challenges. The space needed more light and openness, and since the kitchen was visible immediately upon walking through the front door, they had to find a way to screen it off for a more elegant discovery.

Christina Simon, Senior Designer with Mark Ashby Design, says the team wanted to open the space up by removing the upper cabinets, but without sacrificing storage. Working with the architects, they designed a very mid-century, floating cabinet in the middle of the room to give the kitchen a sense of boundary. “We designed it to be clad in vertical white oak slat panels, ostensibly helping the terrazzo floor acoustics but also creating a visual moment immediately