

# RISING from the EARTH

*Built in 1984, the bunker-esque home was completely transformed by Sara Hadden of CG&S Design-Build.*

By Lauren Jones  
Photography by Andrea Calo



**W**hen hiking on the Hill of Life trail on the Barton Creek Greenbelt, there's one sight that stands out amid the brush, a structure that's been a mystery to many for the last 36 years. It's the city's first concrete earth dwelling, a spot which drums up memories of its eccentric original owners, the Fosters, both former professors at the University of Texas, who were survivalists and yet avid party hosts.

They built the home with safety in mind and even had steel gates constructed to lock up the home in an emergency, as much of the land at the time was uninhabited. "They were ahead of their time, a different breed," remarks current owner Tom Snead. "They went through a lot of trouble in how it was laid out with geothermal and solar, which back in 1984, no one did that."

The home's interesting past was certainly a draw for Snead, who purchased it in 2008, along with its unique architecture, great school district and location. "It had good bones and a lot of potential," he says. "While it was a bunker in the beginning, once opened to the light it would be extraordinary."

Coincidentally, he ran past the property on many occasions for a decade, and when it came on the market, he jumped on making an offer and the sale was finalized in less than one week.

But after eight years in the home, Snead knew it was time to call on an architecture firm to transform his bunker in the hills, ultimately hiring Sara Hadden of CG&S Design-Build. "The property was a time capsule of 1984," she says. "Small penetrations in the home's foot-thick concrete walls and dropped ceilings made the interior dark and cave-like."

CG&S Design-Build and Hadden were brought in to completely brighten up the home with an open-concept layout, a modern aesthetic and room for Snead's museum-worthy art collection. But the remodel would be a challenge due to the thick, concrete roof and walls, and encapsulated wiring. All





new wiring had to be run between the new sheetrock and the existing concrete roof, plus all of the rooms were negatively pressurized to make sure the HVAC system worked properly.

Additionally, the green roof, consisting of five feet of earth, proved to be another challenge. Originally designed as the home's septic field, the field was never activated when city water became available. However, roof penetrations necessary during the remodel required removal of some earth and proper waterproofing of the small disturbed areas. Ultimately, the green roof remained as excellent insulation for the home; the grapevines planted there by the previous owner still flourish.

Today, the home is remarkably different than it was in the 80s but was remodeled in a way that respected its original purpose and design. Parts of the original security structure were repurposed into a trellis, while another is a stand-alone art feature in the driveway. "It's a connection to the history," Snead says.

"The idea is to let the jasmine that exists between the house and the outdoor cabana space grow along the trellis for shade, creating yet another outdoor 'room' for guests to enjoy," Hadden adds.

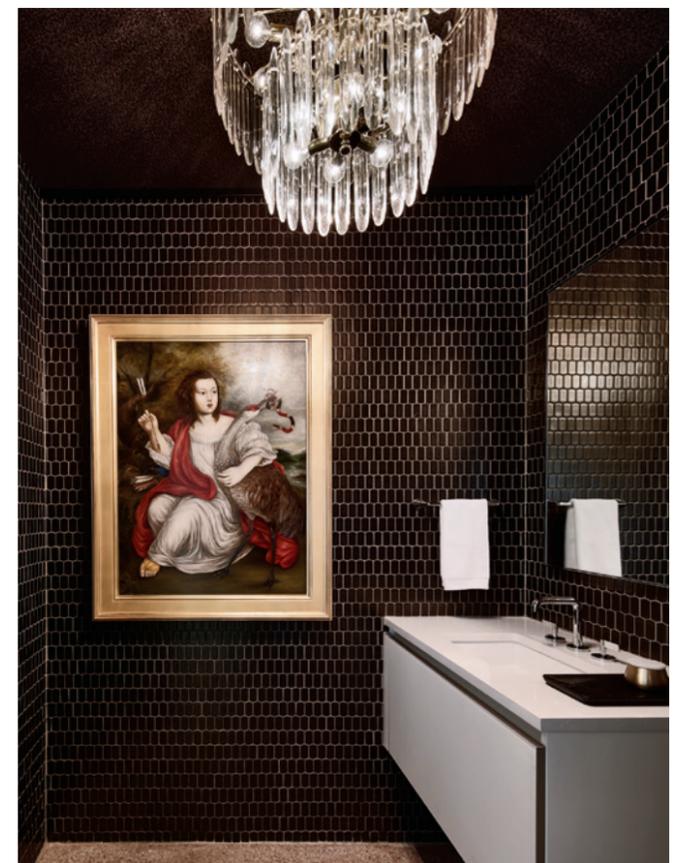
The kitchen, which was relocated from the back of the house, is now in line with the dining and living rooms, and the move "enabled the old kitchen area to be repurposed as a home office, wine room and mudroom," Hadden says. Interior designer Gregory Grammar, owner of Shorelines Interiors, worked on the finishes, which included custom-built Arete cabinetry, fabricated in Europe and built on-site with raw wood veneers and white glass, plus an Ann Sacks® tile backsplash in a beehive pattern that paid homage to the large beehive found on the property when Snead moved in. He loves to cook and entertain, much like the Fosters, and has made use of the built-in wine cellar.

Throughout the home there was near-perfect terrazzo flooring — a beautiful mid-century detail that the CG&S design team and Grammar decided to keep in place. Grammar went with an Ann Sacks Italian porcelain tile for the kitchen floor, master ensuite, powder bath and media room. Other details include the beautiful crushed pearl ceiling detail in the foyer and powder bath from the Belgian company, Omexco, which adds dimensions to the space and an illustrious sparkle, a product Grammar happened across at the Art Deco Show in Paris in January 2018.

In the living room, CG&S Design-Build re-designed the existing fireplace wall, replacing the original fireplace and 80s style brass-trimmed cubbies with a double-sided fireplace. Now, the fireplace is surrounded by a floating stone hearth and mantel with four different colors of Oceanside Glass tile, all selected by Grammar. The tile is likewise used in the pool to connect it with the indoor living spaces. "Onsite during construction, the CG&S craftsmen built a steel frame not only to support the weight of the stone but to enable the floating hearth to double as additional seating," says Hadden.

In the dining room, Snead had a custom-made dining table with room for 10 by designer Mark Jupiter, one of the highest end custom furniture makers in the industry. "The table is made from a piece of solid maple from a tree just five miles away from where I grew up in Eastern Pennsylvania in the Allegheny Mountains," he says.

The master suite, which Hadden believes to be a true gem of the home, was updated thanks to the removal of dated built-in storage and the expansion of a windowless master bath. By incorporating a storage room along the exterior wall of the home, it allowed a large picture window to flood the new bath





with natural light. An adjacent office became the new walk-in closet. The freestanding tub, which is carved from a single block of travertine, sits alongside the new picture window. But, as the home is 10-15 feet above the Hill of Life trail next door, it's impossible for anyone to compromise Snead's privacy. Grammar also chose Robert Kuo for Ann Sacks tile for the dual nature-inspired look.

This is the first home renovation Snead has gone through, and he believes it was all worth it. Not only is the home an

important part of the city's architectural history but it's now filled with light, a big departure from its somewhat apocalyptic origins, and offers some of the best views in town. ♦

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