

Tynewood Home Takes a **Modern Turn**





Design Offers An Italian Villa With 21st Century Style

Text by Cheryl Alexander
Photography by Wade Blizzard
Interior Design by Don Connelly of AREA
Finishes by Segreto Finishes
Construction by Mike Bergenser
of Corbel Construction
Architecture by Michael Landrum, AIA

It only took one visit to this property in Memorial for the clients to become the owners. They admit, "Though the home on the lot was a dated, one-story, flat roof structure, we quickly realized that there are few lots in all of Houston like this one and we knew we had to have it!" When they showed their find to Don Connelly, of AREA, with whom the owners had previously worked in their current home, he advised them to "buy it today! Don't wait!" Don relates, "I felt that they had to act due to the special nature of the property. I didn't want them to lose it."

The homeowners took Don's advice, made an offer which was accepted and quickly began to assemble what they call their "Dream Team." Each member of the team — the designer, the builder, the architect and the homeowners — collaborated on the style of the home. They agreed: not Mediterranean, as "there are already too many Mediterranean-style homes in Memorial," Don asserted. What they decided on was clean lines, high ceilings, steel-cased windows, a bronze standing-seam metal roof, no crown molding, no door trim and no cased openings between rooms. The inspiration came from European Villas with a modern flair and from the fabulous windows the group decided upon.

The architect, Michael Landrum, had a challenge in front of him. Because of the steep ravine at the back of the lot, which offers the homeowners a wonderful wet-weather creek, an opportunity for an amazing view in the treetops, as well as a perfect place to install a

PREVIOUS PAGES: This grand living space just off the large front entrance provides a perfect setting for entertaining. Beautifully grounded by a custom hand-knotted rug by Creative Flooring, a custom coffee table from AREA and the stylish seating options bid guests to make themselves comfortable. A pair of custom slipper chairs are covered in Lee Jofa fabric; the 19th century French chairs in Kravet fabric; and the custom round ottoman in Mokum fabric through George Cameron Nash. A Michael Aram Floor Lamp from AREA and a pair of 19th century Tuscan sconces enhance the natural light pouring in. Entry is made distinctively separate from the living space by a pair of 19th century Italian columns in their original paint. To accommodate for the room's height, bases were added to the columns, matched perfectly by Segreto Finishes.

THESE PAGES: Formal living room is flooded with natural light and made comfortable with ample custom seating. A custom hand-knotted rug by Creative Flooring softens the space, while the custom coffee table from AREA and the Michelle Williams art above the mantle lend a contemporary vibe. | The kitchen, with its huge picture window and doors to the outdoor living area, is a great place to gather for comfort food with friends and family. The W. Gardner antique bread board collection, the 19th century French armoire and the 18th century Italian work table and benches lend to the country charm, while the one-of-a-kind limestone island counter makes it even more unique. | Dining room is open to the living space and feels like a different room due to the dropped ceiling. Enormous art on the wall is a Louisiana bog landscape.





THE INSPIRATION CAME FROM EUROPEAN VILLAS WITH A MODERN FLAIR AND FROM THE FABULOUS WINDOWS THE GROUP DECIDED UPON.



The den feels like a treehouse and offers a place for friends to gather comfortably to converse, or just sit and enjoy the bird's-eye view of the outdoors. A custom sofa with Kravet fabric provides ample space for sitting or lounging. The custom coffee table and tufted ottoman from AREA complete the look and feel of leisure and elegance.



vanishing edge pool, the architecture had to include many different elements that other designs do not have to consider. The result demonstrates how having an architect who not only knows his craft but also understands and appreciates the homeowner's vision is paramount.

Mike Bergenser, the builder, had never built a house like this one before. Though his repertoire is vast, Corbel Construction had previously constructed traditionally designed homes. This would be their initial foray spinning a modern twist onto an Italian Villa. In this case, the first time's the charm. "When a team of professionals takes the time to communicate and work through every possible scenario that could possibly occur, we get the results the homeowners expect, and everyone is happy," said Bergenser.

Don concurs, "It was very important for each of the team members to give the homeowners what is right for their family and the style of their home. Each of us was dedicated to that end result. We each came to know the homeowners very well, from who their children are to the way they bond as a family to the way they entertain in their home." He goes on to explain, "Though elements of design may be consistent within homes that are similar in style, each client's space and the details of their space must be tweaked in order to customize for their lifestyle." Don discloses, "In this home, at first the wife was really nervous about the interior design and decorating decisions. She kept asking, 'Tell me what it will look like; where are you going with this?'"

They both relate the episode that shifted their relationship: Don began the interior decorating work with the home's largest room and scheduled a meeting with the homeowner to present fabrics, colors and floor samples. "The house was unfinished and strewn with construction debris, but I brought in a layout of the rug, the sofa, the drapes... you know... a rendering of the room with all the colors and textures sampled for her and a drawing of where the furniture would be, etc." She finished the story, "It was so gorgeous, I told him, 'You never have to show me anything else.' I trusted him implicitly after that. I knew he understood our style and our lifestyle at that point." Don agrees, "It became organic after that." He beams as he shares that then is when the fun began for him. "Because I own a store, I travel to Europe every 12 to 14 weeks to shop for my store. I just started making a mental list for this home and this family."

For this interview, we are sitting in the expansive



THROUGHOUT MUCH OF THE HOME ARE THESE 200-YEAR-OLD VINTAGE OAK FLOORS FROM A CANADIAN BARN.



Huge windows flood the kitchen with light and give the room a tree-house effect, and the huge Mayan shell limestone island countertop is one-of-a-kind. Vintage Belgian stools invite friends and family to join the cook and offer extra seats for dining. An 18th century Italian work table and benches add to the ambience. .

great room at the home's front entrance, and Don begins pointing to different features, explaining their importance. "Those huge columns came from Europe and are very old. We made them taller to fit beneath these lofty ceilings, and they are still not too big. They perfectly create a sort of foyer, so that though the front door is just there," he demonstrates, "it seems as though it is in a different room. There is ample room in both spaces which lends to that concept."

In fact, each turn of your head reveals a massive feature, yet due to magnitude of the space, the towering ceilings, the huge doorways and windows unobstructed by frames, each feature sits appropriate to scale and purpose.

Don shifts our attention to the dining room, fully visible from where we still sit. "This room," he explains, "is the only one in the home with a dropped ceiling. Because the room is an interior space with no windows, we decided that dropping the ceiling a foot would define it as its own room." They were right; it works perfectly. The dining room is distinctively separate from the great room.

Dan points to the enormous artwork in the dining room—a Louisiana bog landscape. He says, "They hadn't even broken ground on this place yet, and the wife's birthday was approaching. I told her husband to go buy this painting. He went to view it and called me saying, 'I don't get it, but I bought it.' Well... now he gets it." Her gift: the window for their dining room. The scope of the painting and its position on the room's far wall—though it is not an exterior wall—presents the illusion that this huge painting is a huge window to the beautiful, wild outdoors. Nice gift. Nice vision. Great interior design.

We rise then and head to the study, or the "pontificating room" as the homeowner affectionately calls it. No doubt this is a man's space. Though there is no "desk" there is room for men to pontificate over scotch, discussing and deciding the affairs of the world as men do. We cross the room then, to the base of the stairs and the downstairs half bath. Distinctive here is the floor. Throughout much of the home are these 200-year-old vintage oak floors from a Canadian barn that Don says is "big enough for this whole house to fit into. We turned the floor on its ends here, using each piece of each beam efficiently and effectively. How beautiful they are and so unique in this configuration!"

Passing through the butler's pantry into the kitchen, Don points out the countertops in both. They are superb. The kitchen island is one-of-a-kind. The Mayan



THESE PAGES: The upstairs landing and hallway are enhanced with a 19th century Tuscan iron chandelier, custom drapes in Duralee fabric and trim framing the large window and a pair of 19th century French iron sconces. | The study is deemed the “pontificating room” by its owner, and is arranged perfectly for just that. A set of four custom leather chairs from G&H Leather encompass the space, and an antique Oushak rug by Matt Camron sits neatly underneath. The custom glass and steel coffee table by James Dawson and the custom iron and glass lantern from BROWN offer an air of sophistication. | Downstairs hallway is embellished with a 19th century French tapestry, a 19th century French buffet and a 17th century Spanish musket case. In the hallway and throughout the home, walls and ceilings are plastered in a smooth finish gypsum plaster, giving depth and life to surfaces enhancing the clean lines of the architecture.



shell limestone quarry where this amazing sheet of stone was excavated is finished. The kitchen window above the sink puts you in a treehouse with its 14-foot by 6-foot view, flooding the room with natural light.

Entertainment rooms flank the ends of the house — one for the kids, with a rougher and tougher edge; and one for the grown-ups, a bit softer and more comfortable. If you've got the room, this is an excellent choice.

Each just far enough from the other to be seamlessly separate.

As we approach the end of the interview and meander towards the door, the homeowner speaks again, "We use every square inch of this house. There is no wasted space and no wasted rooms." This modern villa authentically represents the 21st century's finest in architecture, construction, design and décor.