

Worth the Wait

New home on coveted lot culminates personal and professional achievements



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Architecture by Todd Rice, Rice Residential Design

Construction by Corbel Custom Homes

Landscape design by Guillen Landscape

Interiors by Don Connelly and Calvin Azzam, AREA

In a metropolitan area, especially one like Houston, few neighborhoods can offer families a sense of small town living and few residential spaces are ensconced within a natural setting. Yet just 15 minutes from the Galleria lies Sandalwood, one of Houston's vintage subdivisions in the heart of Memorial.

Spring-fed lakes surround homes on beautiful lots with mature trees. Canoes and paddle boats, a floating pier and rope swings, and an old-fashioned diving board provide activity year round on the neighborhood's three lakes. Children's shouts and laughter fill the air, and parents still let their kids play outside until dusk without reservation. Homeowners enjoy walking and jogging on the winding nature trails around the lakes and Buffalo Bayou. Fun activities are planned throughout the year at the lakes and the private park. Sandalwood is a true neighborhood in the old-fashioned sense.

Typically, when people buy a home in Sandalwood, they stay. Homes and lots for sale are coveted and are never on the market for very long. So when Mike Bregenzer of Corbel Custom Homes learned that there might be an opportunity to buy a lot with which he was familiar, he immediately began to investigate. It was located on a ravine, just behind one of the lakes, and surrounded by trees with no neighbor in sight from the backyard. For a builder, this was a pot of gold at the end of a rainbow.

However, Mike was not looking at this lot with the intention of putting it into Corbel's inventory. He and his wife Cheryl had lived in Sandalwood with their children — twin boys Marshall and Mason (14) and daughter Maddie (12) — along with Butler, their 4-year-old King Charles Cavalier, for several years. They were already familiar with the neighborhood's amenities and were enjoying the lifestyle and relationships they had established



THESE PAGES: Contemporary villa nestled in the heart of Memorial. | Less is more at this home's front entry. Steel window and door unit from Atelier Domingue; Moroccan oil jars from Chateau Domingue; 18th century European shutters from Chateau Domingue. | This family room is the hub of the home and it allows for both comfort and activity. Custom sofas in J. Robert Scott velvet; 18th century French trumeau from AREA; pillows in Martin Lawrence Ballard fabrics; antique French trunk doubles as a table surface and a television lift; art by Melanie Millar; and paint color here and on walls throughout the home is Creamy by Sherwin Williams.

over time. They were looking at the lot as a place to build a new home where they could continue to enjoy their lives and watch their children grow. Acquisition of the lot required more time than is typical due to extenuating circumstances with the previous owner, but Mike and Cheryl were willing to be patient to make the deal work.

"I had a special home design in my head that I wanted to build on just the right lot, and I knew this was it, so I commenced with the project design," said Mike. "What influenced my design were features and details that I'd connected with and was attracted to in many of the homes I've built throughout my career."

Mike and his partners — his brother

Nick and his mother Fran — are responsible for building more than 100 custom homes, primarily in the Memorial area of Houston, spanning 14 years.

Mike also assembled his team based on his career experience, including Todd Rice and Don Connelly.

"I've worked with Don and Todd for more than 12 years," he said. "We have done many award-winning homes together. Because of our synergy, it was an easy decision to team up again on my most important project to date — my home."

Mike worked with Don on all aspects well before the home was ever started — from exterior design selections, to furniture layouts and room sizes, all the way



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The floating staircase flooded with light from the oversized steel-framed windows provides a spacious, contemporary aesthetic. Round mirror in brass by Artesions; Lucite chairs by Interlude Home; drapes in Robert Allen linen with custom embroidery; and cow drawing in charcoal by Mary Case. | The library is remarkable in both color and design, and doubles as a family gallery with many of the shelves displaying family pictures, kids' medals and art along with books. Custom swivel chairs from AREA in Osbourne & Little fabric; ottoman in Duralee linen; drapes in embroidered linen from Robert Allen; and custom blue blended paint mixed by Benjamin Moore.



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This home's kitchen has it all. Form, function, space and beauty. Stained concrete floors by David Miller Designs; brass and marble shelves by James Dawson Design; Calacatta Lincoln marble countertop by Omni Surfaces; and custom blue blended paint mixed by Benjamin Moore.

through fixtures selections and finishing with furniture, accents, draperies and art.

"Don truly is incredible to work with," said Cheryl. "He always knew just the right selection to make us happy. We are good friends and had a blast throughout the whole process, which I know might sound impossible to some, but for us it is true."

Todd and Mike have worked together for years, and Todd is also a family friend. Mike relied a great deal on Todd's architectural expertise. "He has a knack for extracting ideas from my head," Mike said, "and then he gets them on paper with just the right proportions, details and historical authenticity."

The team finished the architectural plans before the Bregenzers even acquired the home site, so when they closed on the

lot, they were able to start building the very next day. Within 10 months after breaking ground, the family was enjoying living in their new home.

The finished project is distinctive. Outwardly, the home is an Old World Italian villa that features simplistic roof lines with enlarged cypress-planked overhangs supported by unique-shaped roof brackets. The facade is a combination of random-laid limestone with smooth hand-troweled stucco. The front of the home is highlighted with oversized, custom-made steel-framed windows and door units which are accented at the front porch with a pair of 18th century European shutters.

The interior design is transitional, combining contemporary style with unique antique furnishings and building materials.



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THESE PAGES: Walls of steel-framed windows provide a striking view of the backyard from the living and breakfast room. | A powder room comes alive with striking wallpaper by Osborne Little. Custom vanity from reclaimed wood; Belgian stone sink from AREA; and Jean Bois mirror from Wisteria Home. | The cabinet display design in this bar makes it a work of art. Messina Grey marble countertops from Walker Zanger; backlit liquor shadow box by Lighting Illuminations; and Custom designed steel and glass shelves by James Dawson Design. | As part of the front gallery in this home, the dining room makes a quiet statement of elegance. Custom dining room table in Belgian blue stone with reclaimed wood base; nine painted metal panels in acrylic frames by Michelle Williams; and antique Spanish chairs from AREA.



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The background color is neutral and uniform throughout the home, thus allowing an infusion of color wherever and whenever the family desires.

“We wanted the house palette to be soft and transparent in order to accentuate the furnishings and building elements,” explained Don. “These colors are carried throughout the home and master bedroom, with complementing secondary bedroom colors.”

The front gallery, which spans the entire width of the home, is majestic. The ceilings soar and light from the huge windows floods the space. Reclaimed European chestnut floors in a wide 30-degree chevron pattern are striking and unique. A floating stair to the left of the entry is a dramatic welcome to the home and boasts the same extraordinary chestnut that is used throughout the upstairs rooms.

Moving beyond the downstairs gallery, the home’s common areas beckon with an open floor plan that accentuates the family’s style and personal tastes, and most importantly it provides ease of living and access to lots of family activities. Perhaps the most interesting element is the family room’s large glass window and door wall that brings the outdoors in, offering an expansive view of nature and the ravine.

The pool and veranda make for a great setting overlooking the ravine, complemented by the natural, subtle landscape. And the kids all agree that the backyard, veranda and pool area are their favorite parts of the home, aside from their own rooms, which they personalized and love spending time in.



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THESE PAGES: An Industrial bench by AREA along with Pecky Cypress headboard and night stands by Design Woodworks make Mason's room one where he loves spending his time. | Marshall's room is personalized with the reclaimed Texas barn-wood wall and striped fabrics. Contemporary-designed bed stool by AREA. | Serenity and privacy are the undertones in the master bedroom. Night stands from Interlude Home; marble lamps by Joe Richard; and mirrors by Bungalow 5 Home. | An entire wall in marble speaks nothing but luxury in the master bath. Danby marble flooring, wall and countertops by Walker Zanger; freestanding tub by Evanescence. | Outdoor space overlooking pool is complete with TV, dining and lounging area.



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“I was trying to buy this lot for over three years,” said Mike. “And I designed this home before I ever purchased the lot.”

The kitchen, too, is remarkable. Suspended brass and marble open shelves, custom blended blue cabinets and the 18th century Baker’s Hutch incorporated within the cabinetry make a bold style statement. An oversized island allows ample room for mom to prep meals and doubles as a snack/homework bar for the teens.

Upstairs the spaces become more personal. Each kid’s room is customized with unique architectural features, and they have their own common area — a game room, where an oversized sectional is the only formal seating choice. Otherwise a cushioned carpet floor and big pillows provide lounging options.

The master bedroom is also upstairs, on

the opposite end of the house from the kids’ spaces. The couple made this decision in order to maximize on the view. “When we wake up, we see the treetops,” said Cheryl. “It’s the most peaceful feeling, with our furnishings and decor all back-dropped with this great view. It’s like art when we look out our window. Only better, because it is real.”

That serene aesthetic is carried into the master bath, where the view is also accessible. An entire wall of Danby marble makes the space as luxurious as it gets. Floating cabinets with under-mount lighting keep things clean and contemporary.

“This is our dream home,” said Cheryl. “It truly has everything in it we love, and

the design allows us to be near our children as they grow.”

The house is a culmination and manifestation of more than 14 years of Mike’s building experience expressed in its design, detail, space planning, building materials and practical livability.

“I was trying to buy this lot for over three years,” said Mike. “And I designed this home before I ever purchased the lot. I just knew we would get it. Todd, Don and I really took a leap of faith on this project. Now, as I look at the finished product, see the contentment on the faces of my family and experience the satisfaction I feel when I come home, I know it was definitely worth the wait.” ●