

Mount Bonnell home floats off the edge of the hillside

Real estate agent pairs art with contemporary style of house

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Looking up from Lake Austin to Mount Bonnell, a see-through pool hangs over the edge and a home looks like it's suspended magically over the hillside.

Designed by Andersson-Wise Architects, the home at 3402 Mount Bonnell Road seems to have been put on its lot by magic, but the ultra-contemporary house was carefully engineered using six Y-shaped steel supports to suspend the platform of the house over the property.

The architecture firm consulted with Chuck Naeve of Architectural Engineers Collaborative, who typically works on big buildings such as the Barbara Jordan Passenger Terminal at Austin-Bergstrom International Airport and the Long Center for the Performing Arts, to make sure it would be safe for the entire house to "hover" over Mount Bonnell.

The pool, by Root Design Co., follows this same structural ideal. Its cantilevered structure ends in thick Plexiglas walls that allow swimmers to feel like they are swimming over the edge of the hill and onto Lake Austin below.

The house was built last year on a trapezoidal-shaped lot for University of Texas Law professors Bernard Black and Katherine Litvak, who moved last month to Chicago to work at Northwestern University. The couple previously had lived in a house next door and bought the lot as a challenge to see what could be built there.

When his firm was hired, Arthur Andersson says, "We got very excited about building a building that took advantage of the steepness of the site."

Andersson-Wise met the challenge with a 5,444-square-foot main house sided in massaranduba, a tropical hardwood, and a 544-square-foot guest house above the two-car garage. The firm designed the ultra-contemporary house like a two-story urban loft. Walls of windows on both floors take in the panoramic view of Lake Austin and the hills of the Westlake area.

"We got out on that site and the view just presented itself," Andersson says. "Let's just have a building that's mostly glass."

The house "is like being in a piece of sculpture that is all about the view," says real estate agent Barbara Boyd of Boyd & Boyd Properties. The house is listed for \$3.5 million through Boyd.

Art gallery emerges

Unlike many homes on the market that are perfectly staged with furniture, Boyd took out all the furniture and teamed with Austin art consultant Deborah Page Schneider of Deborah Page Projects. Schneider brought in pieces she collected while living in California, including oversized chairs and contemporary art.

Artist Greg Miller, who just moved to Austin from the Los Angeles area, is featured heavily throughout the house. His work features paintings of nostalgic roadside signs, beautiful women and text. Actresses Jessica Alba, Sharon Stone and Marg Helgenberger all have pieces from Miller.

Boyd and Schneider are planning an open house later this month for invited guests to see the house and the art.

Entering the house, guests first see "Hand Painted Levi Jacket" by L.A. artist Tom Holland in the foyer. The built-in shoe rack in the corner was important for Black, who biked to work at UT. He could leave his cycling shoes here without tracking dirt throughout the bamboo-floored home.

In the great room, potential buyers are welcomed by Miller's "Big 8 Motel" painting. Around the corner, a gigantic cowhide and upholstered chair sits in one corner. A metal wire chair rests in another. The art cannot compare with the display nature is putting on through the windows looking out onto Lake Austin. A wraparound porch made of massaranduba provides a closer look.

Throughout the interior, the house mixes shades of grays and whites on the walls and ceiling with the light browns of the bamboo floors. The light that streams in from the windows introduces its own color variations throughout the day.

The grays become "a neutral palette," says Andersson. "The color scheme you would think would be so dark, but that much light can handle it."

The grays also have hints of blue to them, adding to the cool greens of Lake Austin and the surrounding vegetation.

In the gunmetal gray kitchen with stainless-steel counters, tongue-in-cheek art includes "Cocktails," a robot and martini glass, by Michael Mew; "Clone Six Pack," sculpted bottles with the word "clone" carved in each, by Randy Hussong; and "Born Not to Kill," a tar-coated teddy bear with a gun, by Mattia Biagi. The kitchen looks out into the living room, which makes the floor plan ideal for entertaining.

Next to the kitchen is a full bathroom, with access to the pool, and the dining room, with another Greg Miller painting, "Sudden Luck," crowning the room. A half-bathroom in the center of the first floor is easily accessible from the kitchen, living room and dining room.

The pool area covers one side of the lot. The massaranduba deck leads to the shallow sloping beach area and the hot tub. The 83-foot lap pool runs alongside both the beach and hot tub, until the pool juts out farther to hang over the hill.

The front of the house is fenced in for a play area for the couple's two children. In the back of the house, a walking trail takes hikers down the rugged, steep, undeveloped hill that is the backyard.

Back inside, the contemporary staircase features cutouts of stairs along one wall and a zigzagging metal railing.

The second-story master suite can be completely shut off from the rest of the house for privacy. The master bathroom on one side features a toilet and bidet, a shower room and vanity. The couple opted not to include a bathtub, but the bathroom is plumbed for one. Two large closet rooms are beside the bathroom.

Across the hall, a study also could be used as a nursery. The master bedroom is next door. All the rooms upstairs feature large windows, automatic window shades and mirrors or see-through glass in the corners to make it look as if you are surrounded by the view.

On the other side of the second story, the laundry room and a full bathroom are across the hall from a second bedroom. A family room or second study is between this bedroom and a third bedroom with its own bathroom. Pocket doors in the family room can be opened to create one large room with the bedrooms on either side. The family room offers a built-in bench along the window.

A fourth bedroom with a full bathroom is on the other side of the hall.

The bathrooms feature clean lines and shades of grays and whites in the tile and contemporary vanities.

Schneider has chosen for this floor works including "Informal Economy Vendor #1," a black-and-white picture of a shattered vendor cart by Julio Cesar Morales; "Bedroom Eyes" and "Greatest Thrill to Loan" by Miller; "Sling Chair," a Lucite and chrome-plated steel chair by Charles Hollis Jones; "Suit Jackets," a trio of red, blue and yellow striped jackets by Shawn Shepherd; and "M-16," a ceramic and corrugated-metal gun by Hamilton Van Watts.

The couple used the garage apartment for their nanny. It features a living room, kitchen, bedroom and full bathroom in 544 square feet. A high glass panel, like a classic clerestory window, visually connects the living room to the bedroom. There is a second laundry area in the two-car garage below.

Contemporary and green

Andersson-Wise and builder Branson Fustes of Pilgrim Building Co., chose energy-efficient, sustainable features and materials when planning this house. Structural insulated panels in the roof and walls completely surround the

house in insulation.

Commercial windows feature high-performance Low-E glass with an 80 percent reflectivity value to minimize the amount of heat the home gains from the sun.

Motorized remote-controlled sun shades, one translucent and another opaque, inside the rooms help keep the sun's heat out during the day. The sun is overhead most of the day, but "as the sun goes down, you get a nice, raking light" through the home's many west-facing windows, Andersson says.

The massaranduba wood in the siding and deck is grown on a plantation, "so we're not tearing down old-growth forests," Andersson says. It's a very hard wood, almost as hard as stone, he says, and can last 50 or 100 years. It will turn a beautiful gray color as it ages.

Copper pipes direct rainwater from the standing-seam metal roof to the 5,000-gallon collection tank under the house.

Even the home's functional elements don't take away from the artistry of its design. In each room, the air vent is disguised as a thin, long black line cut into the wall high above the doorway or closet.

All the home's doors, even in the nanny's quarters, are outlined with a dark line notched into the wall, a sort of reverse trim.

"Being in that home, it is perfection in its details," says Boyd. "It is so simple, but when you look at how the planes come together, it's perfection. Every time I'm in that house, I always discover another detail."

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