



BUILDING WITHIN A CITY'S
HISTORIC PRESERVATION
GUIDELINES CAN BE A
CHALLENGE. HERE'S THE STORY
OF ONE AUSTIN COUPLE WHO
LEARNED THE INS AND
OUTS FIRSTHAND.

HISTORICALLY MODERN

By **ELIZABETH BOND** | Photography by **CASEY FRY**





When Ann Czarnik and Jason Fernandez moved to Austin from the East Coast, they first rented in the Hyde Park neighborhood, established in 1891 and considered the city’s first suburb. Once they decided to buy a home, they picked one on the east side of town and bought it — but never moved in.

Their subsequent path to finding, purchasing, renovating and finally moving in to a home of their own turned out to be an intensive lesson on historical home permitting.

“To put it simply, we took a roundabout journey to getting where we are,” said Ann, who’s an ER doctor.

In their 2012 home search, the couple looked throughout Central Austin and found that many of the homes were highly priced, “and even then, you’d have to redo the kitchen or something,” she said. They were feeling harried about the search process when they went to a party thrown by a college friend and loved the look of their friend’s home.

“We found out Jeff Bullard had worked on it, and we knew we wanted him to work on our future home before we even had decided on a property,” Ann said. “From then on, the idea was to find a house we could remodel — use the existing structure and add on to it.”

Jeff Bullard is the co-founder of Avenue B Development, an award-winning construction and remodeling firm specializing in classic Austin homes. The firm is focused on enhancing the character of Austin’s unique neighborhoods with homes grounded in classic design and modern functionality.

The couple bought the home in East Austin and started drawing the plans. But then they hit a roadblock.

“Ten people in the neighborhood wrote letters saying they didn’t want us to build,” Ann said.

Part of the foundation might have been from 1898, she said, and the roof was put on around the 1940s. Therefore, it fell under certain restrictions put on both historical structures and any new or renovated structures in historically designated areas.



To work out the proper permitting, they learned that they must take into account the neighbors’ letters of complaint during a hearing held by the city historical commission and also communicate with the neighborhood association and the city’s planning and zoning office.

Each of these entities has a different role. The neighborhood association can make recommendations about changes it would like to see, the city determines whether to give permits for construction work and the historical commission handles any complaints. Local historic districts help to preserve the unique character and history of Austin’s older neighborhoods by

protecting existing historic buildings and ensuring compatible new design, according to the city’s website.

Ann and Jason decided the process had become too complicated to move forward with the project.

“We sold the property and started all over,” Ann said. “Fortunately for us, the Austin market is pretty robust and we were able to sell it.”

The home search was back on. In time, they settled on a home in Bryker Woods where they could pursue a renovation project with their chosen contractor. As it turns out, their connection with Jeff led them to the property.

“We found the new property through a job Jeff had — he renovated the bathroom of our now next-door neighbor, who told him the house would soon be for sale,” Ann said. “They took an offer off the market.”

This time, they took a much more cautious approach to making renovation plans.

“We didn’t start drawing until we got approval from the neighborhood association, the city and the historical commission,” the homeowner said. “The work took place from September to June so that we could make sure everything was in compliance. We learned that lesson the hard way because we just



didn't know what we were doing the first time."

Studying up on the Bryker Woods neighborhood revealed that the area's homes are built in a variety of styles that reflect a number of time periods but have a general aesthetic in common. Most homes are pier and beam and generally of a modest size with inviting front porches and open front yards, garages placed in back of the home and outdoor spaces with mature trees providing lots of shade. The streets of this neighborhood near the Shoal Creek greenbelt are fairly narrow and walkable, and the neighborhood is part of the Old West Austin Historic District, which is recognized on the National Register of Historic Places by the United States Department of Interior for its historic significance.

The neighborhood association did raise concerns about such things as the pitch of the roof and roof materials. Because of the homeowners' hard-won familiarity with the proper processes, these matters were settled fairly easily.

"I feel like we kept the house in the feeling of the neighborhood," Ann said. "It was very important to us to do something that wasn't garish."

With the potential for permitting issues out of the way, there was only one other major obstacle. The plans called for using the framing and all the original oak flooring, but the roof was taken off the weekend of the flooding that delayed ACL Fest. Water damage scrapped those plans.

But things did move forward, and a house that had been 1,400 square feet became 3,100 square feet of what Ann calls "modern industrial farmhouse." With that theme in mind, the homeowners made decisions on picking out each and every feature, including industrial-looking chandeliers hung in rooms with sliding barn doors. The house has metal and concrete accents but there's also hardwood and shiplap throughout.

"We picked out every single detail of the house down to mixing my own paint colors I found on Houzz," Ann said. "Jeff would recommend a tile person or a fabricator for countertops,



for example, and was able to do everything we asked him to do. He created a fireplace in the back and added sliding doors inside. I found the hardware for those online and they figured out how to make it work."

Now living comfortably in a home they designed and carefully took from idea to reality, the couple is pleased with the process as they look back.

"I love the whole house," she said. "It's a serene, beautiful place. It's very different from the original structure but we feel like it fits in the neighborhood." ❖

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