



RESPECTING FORD'S VISION



By **ANGELA RABKE** Photography by **MARK MENJIVAR**

Quietly tucked into a San Antonio hillside sits an architectural gem with endless views of a twinkling horizon and a marvelous history of collaboration between architects, artists and residents. Over the course of time, many aspects of the Rockridge House, built in 1956, had fallen into disrepair, but when the house — designed by celebrated architect O’Neil Ford — became available several years back, owners Toby and Emma Calvert knew that it was a project well worth the effort. “We knew this was a house that we could live in for the rest of our lives. It has such good bones. We were in it for the long haul,” says Toby. “It’s a little like a marriage, and we are fully committed to it.” After eight years in the residence, the results of their commitment are evident in every detail.

Early in the process, projects addressed big basics like replacing the roof and air conditioning system. Serving as their own general contractors along the way, the Calverts lived in the three-bedroom residence with their two young daughters throughout all of the remodeling projects, and laughingly note that while the girls weren’t big fans of their new home in the beginning phases, it has become a central location for their gatherings today, largely in part to the stunning exterior and landscaping plan developed



by San Antonio architect Tobin Smith. In addition to addressing practical matters such as drainage (the entry hall famously flooded during their first big rainstorm), Smith's plan draws the eye outward. The home's dramatic sliding doors and windows offer peaceful views on all sides, and additional transparency was created by replacing solid doors with glass in some cases. An infinity pool with a sweeping view of the city serves as a focal point for both interior views and exterior experiences, and replaces what used to be an overgrown mass of plants that obscured the dramatic view. Built by Artesian Pools, the pool appears to soar into open space and required thoughtful engineering given its cliffside location. Originally Smith and the Calverts considered putting the pool in a different area, but ultimately decided that the extra effort would be well worth it.

Smith gave equal attention to each outdoor space, resulting in a series of delightful courtyards and water features that, in the words of the Calverts, "inspire our kids to look out." The stories

that come with the exterior spaces add to the home's collaborative narrative, beginning with a clay wall fountain of three children climbing a tree. The fountain, tucked into the corner of a central courtyard and designed by San Antonio artist Martha Mood, was an important relic. "It didn't work when we moved in, but we knew it was important to keep it here and to make it functional," said Toby. "The three children in the sculpture are actually the kids who originally lived in this house, the Fitzsimmons kids, climbing the tree of life. It's really almost the soul of the house."

Each and every detail in the home is deliberate in its connection between the past and present, and the Calverts have often used artisans who were involved in the original design. As a result, old and new aspects of the home, and the stories that go along with them, fit together seamlessly across generations. Another of the exterior fountains was actualized after the Calvert's neighbor, Boone Powell, brought over some original sketches he had made of a fountain, created with an array of copper canoe-shaped vessels,





while he was traveling in Europe back in the 1960's. Powell, who was one of O'Neil Ford's partners in architectural practice, was well-acquainted with the home and felt a fountain would be a good addition to the courtyard. Inspired by the drawings, Smith translated the idea into triangular forms and scaled it to fit the Saltillo backdrop. The copper fountain, which offers a tranquil focal point from the kitchen area, was created by San Antonio metal smith Denise Kocurek, the same artist who created the original metalwork for the home's address when she worked for artist and craftsman Lynn Ford, O'Neil's brother. The elaborately carved front doors, made of teak, were created by Lynn and are original to the residence, while the eye-catching bar, immediately inside the home's entryway, is new, and was designed by San Antonio cabinet maker Peter Zubiate to mirror original paneling designs from Ford homes and reflect the unique front doors.

"We knew we wanted to keep the integrity of the house, and finish what the previous owners started," said Emma. Keeping

that principal in mind and applying it to the outdoor spaces, Smith utilized Saltillo tile for exterior flooring, a material that was an important element of the previous outdoor seating area. Concrete and river stones define all of the outdoor spaces, with steel details that mimic the home's roof. Rain chains are beautiful and functional, and custom gates created with galvanized steel and Ipe wood complete the peaceful outdoor spaces.

A separate guest house, recently renovated, includes the original mid-century kitchenette, complete with vintage appliances — all in working order. The quiet guest quarters also serve as a media room for family movie nights. An additional structure, simple and elegant, is tucked into a separate courtyard. This building provides another interesting bit of history for the property, having originally been designed by architect Chris Carson, another one of Ford's partners. Now dedicated to Toby's hobbies, it offers a glimpse of another personalized aspect of the home's interior design: the speakers. Calvert enjoys building





speakers, and created the beautifully designed (and yes, incredibly powerful) wall-mounted speakers in the main living area of the home. Facing them is a stunning piece by artist Laddy John Dill.

The Rockridge House is still a work in progress, but the Calverts are excited about the future. “It’s a big commitment, but it’s a fun one. One of the best parts has been talking to Tobin, dreaming about how the house will look one day,” said Toby. Their next projects are a bit smaller: a fire pit and an extensive bathroom remodel, but with such stewards the results are sure to contribute to the Rockridge House’s authenticity and history. ❖

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