

Ranch Revival

By MAURI ELBEL | Photography by DROR BALDINGER



When a couple enamored with mid-century modern architecture wanted to salvage and rebuild a dated ranch home sitting on a sprawling Alamo Heights lot, they turned to an architect with a proven record.

“I had redesigned my similar 50’s era styled ranch home just two blocks away,” says architect Craig McMahon.



Familiar with the challenges that accompany remodeling a mid-century ranch home — low ceilings, limited natural light and a maze of hallways and disconnected rooms — the architect also recognized the existing potential.

“People would come through and say ‘Wow I didn’t know you could do this to older homes like these to get this open space,’” McMahon says. “I enjoy doing this kind of work. It becomes an exploration of how we can add to this in a way that complements it and what we can do to make it really cool and livable.”

From the onset of the project, the homeowners wanted to transform this 1953 house into a contemporary home that embodied the spirit of the mid-century California modern ranch

homes embracing the iconic architects like Eichler and May. Because the red brick, gray roofed 2,100-square-foot home would require extensive work to create open spaces and a more livable program that included additional bedrooms and bathrooms, McMahon initially suggested tearing it down, subdividing the lot and selling off one portion to offset new construction costs.

“We were doing so much to this home, I said ‘Why don’t we just tear it down and build a brand new home?’,” he recalls.

But staying true to their vision, the clients remained adamant about working with the existing home and maintaining the extra green space afforded by their generous property. Sitting on a wide lot (approximately 116 feet by 150 feet), the existing brick home

stretched from end to end, offering plenty of room to expand in the backyard area with additional bedrooms. The home’s original linear backyard-facing screened porch became the central anchoring element in the new design with additional spaces surrounding it.

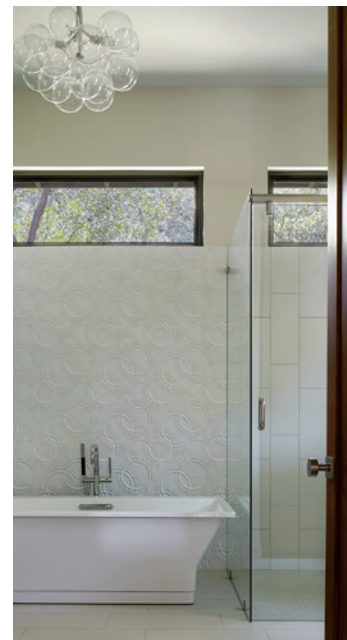
“There was an original 45-foot porch which the new homeowners were adamant about keeping,” explains McMahon. “In fact, the entire design ended up wrapping the house around this wide porch.”

McMahon opened up the home by removing most of the interior walls to create a more spacious, inviting living, dining and kitchen space with glass on both sides. The home moves toward the east with the 1,400-square-foot addition

comprising additional bedroom and bathroom spaces which circle the main space of the home.

“The open space is great,” says McMahon. “We created zones for living, a great entry family room and we spun all the bedrooms around that. There is a hierarchy of space and everything is focused around this screened porch.”

Living areas were created by removing interior walls separating rooms and then vaulting to the original roof line to create more dramatic, open interior spaces. As the home included a variety of exterior materials, order was given to the residence by utilizing a three material palette to give emphasis to different exterior zones. Stucco was used as the primary base



grounding material covering the original red brick. Painted Hardie board siding was chosen for building insets while pre-finished metal siding accentuates architectural stand-out features such as EcoSmart™ fireplaces that provide warmth without smoke by burning gel fuel fires.

A detached stackable four-car garage with a car lift was designed as a pool cabana and workshop that blends in rather than stands out. The pool, designed and built by Artesian Pools, fits impeccably in the L-shaped design of the home and serves as an anchoring feature without overwhelming the main home. The addition focused to the east side of the property allows for a courtyard edge to the new pool.

Today, the 3,600-square-foot, 5-bedroom, 4-bath home embraces its mid-century ranch architectural roots with the addition maintaining a harmonious connection with a new and modern look.

“We kept the scale of the home and worked with existing window openings where we could,” he says. “It is a really cool interpretation of this 50’s house, but it looks very contemporary and has a very strong feel when you look from the street.”

Once a proponent for tearing down and starting over, McMahon says he is pleased with the remodel’s successful, cost-effective transformation that brought this house up to date for its current homeowners who played a significant role throughout the design.

Having clients on board throughout the design resulted in a more meaningful process and resulted in the austere and contemporary feel of the home translated through unique furnishings and finishes ranging from the wide plank hardwood flooring up to the 1-by-6 dark stained pine ceilings. Previously compartmentalized and segregated, the home now meets the needs of today with large, open and flowing spaces while green elements such as on-demand water heating systems, a new HVAC system balanced with open cell spray foam insulation and completely new insulated exterior windows and doors fit in with today’s efficiency expectations.

“If you are willing to roll up your sleeves, there is a huge opportunity when remodeling these older houses,” McMahon says. “You do have to work with what’s there, but by exploring what exists and removing walls and opening up the ceilings, you can dramatically change these ranch homes.” ❖

CRAIG MCMAHON ARCHITECTS, INC.
210.710.3874 | Cmarctx.com