

Before and **AFTER**

*How Arbib Hughey Design
transformed a spec home
into a dream home*

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*Kaoru and Yuriko Kiguchi have lived
at the same address for nearly
a quarter century, happily raising
their three children in their
family home that was recently
transformed into the contemporary
house of their dreams.*



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The now retired couple, both born and raised in Tokyo, moved to Austin in 1993 and purchased a 1980's spec house in a beautiful hilly neighborhood graced with mature, leafy trees and spectacular Hill Country views just minutes from downtown Austin.

Longing for something more contemporary but not wanting to move from the beloved Westlake Hills-area neighborhood where they had created so many memories, once the last of their children had grown and moved out, the empty nesters decided it was time for a major remodel.

"My dream was to live in a contemporary house close to downtown (Austin) but still be surrounded by green," says Kaoru. "As retirement neared, we decided it was time to renovate our family home."

The Kiguchis did their homework, carefully curating a book

of ideas and images of modern and contemporary designs they were drawn toward. Initially Yuriko preferred a more traditional, colonial-style home, but as they dug deeper into design, they eventually landed on the same page, both gravitating toward the modern aesthetic.

"Our research included attending the AIA tours for several years, and as we toured many homes, Yuriko gradually leaned towards remodeling our home towards a more contemporary-styled home," recalls Kaoru. "She found the simple, sophisticated and functional motif of many of these contemporary-styled homes refreshing, especially at this stage in our lives."

After years spent admiring architecturally-inspiring homes, the Kiguchi's remodel was selected as a featured project on a recent AIA Austin Homes Tour—a full-circle revelation that proves the extent of the home's major makeover. The 1980's home that once blended into the neighborhood now stands

proudly on the hill with a simple yet powerful contemporary design by Arbib Hughey Design. The firm's principles, Ben Arbib and Edward Hughey, met the clients through their son, Tats Kiguchi, a structural engineer who they had worked with on various projects.

If it were possible to put the before and after homes side-by-side, it would be difficult to believe they were the same house — a design feat the couple says resulted from working with architects who sincerely listened to their requests and completed their vision.

"The house was in a bit of disrepair," says Arbib of the original house that was suffering from an unstable foundation. "Structural issues were causing the home to start sliding down the hillside, which sort of curtailed us from expanding the footprint. It became a question of 'what can we do with what we have?' These homeowners had a lot of faith in us and our design vision — they were open to thinking about and exploring new ideas."

After shoring up the house, the architects looked for inspiration in its existing bones and site, striving to create a brighter, fresher look by opening up the program and selecting a more striking and simple material palette.



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the formal dining room. The design move defines spaces rather than closes them off.

“The curved design of the kitchen is key to separating the kitchen from the living space without a drastic compartmentalization of the rooms,” explains Kaoru. “It allows the ground floor to be open but very functional.”

Another goal was to open up the house to the outdoor views and brighten the interiors. The house sat on top of a hill with incredible views towards the Hill Country, which were not being realized due to small windows and poor placement.

“They had a million-dollar view that was not being taken advantage of,” says Hughey.

Reconsidering the plan of the house, the architects reconfigured existing window openings and added larger ones to achieve expansive outdoor views from all angles. The existing stairwell was rebuilt to lead up to a catwalk and a two-story window wall that now floods the home with natural light. A once small and cramped upstairs bedroom was absorbed into a large, communal space graced with spectacular views that were lacking before. Now, the empty nesters are able to live primarily on the first floor while using the second floor to accommodate their visiting children and grandchildren.

Upgrading exterior and interior materials brought the home up to date. Inside, white washed oak engineered wood floors now flow seamlessly throughout and clear-coated pine

walls add warmth to the modern design. On the outside, a brown limestone façade was replaced with a crystal white hand-troweled, smooth finish stucco. Hardi® lap siding was given a contemporary makeover with a darker coat of paint in Benjamin Moore’s Iron Mountain. The wood-piled roof was replaced with a standing seam galvanized metal roof with adjusted lines for a cleaner edge. A single pop of color on the front door — Benjamin Moore’s® Yew Green—provides a crisp contrast.

“We wanted to create a little bit of snap,” says Hughey. “There is a brightness and liveliness to the house now which intrigues you and brings you in.”

The home’s entry sequence was reconfigured with natural stone steps nestled in the uncut native grass which welcomes visitors to a terraced courtyard and front entry. In the back, the earth was leveled to create a gathering space, retaining the area with gabion walls (steel cages filled with rock) and native plantings.

Making big changes without spending big dollars is some-



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Opening up the floorplan to create flow between various spaces and rooms was achieved by knocking out walls dividing the kitchen, dining and living rooms and using cabinetry to define and contextualize various areas. One component of the existing structure just didn’t fit: an octagonal-shaped area coming off the kitchen Hughey and Arbib nicknamed the “tower.” But, during the architectural process, the architects say this feature ultimately became the overarching nucleus for the redesign.

“Originally we wanted to get rid of it and do something completely different,” says Hughey. “But the budget didn’t allow for it so we decided to incorporate it into the house — and it generated the basis for the design.”

Arbib and Hughey softened the space by rounding out the corners and creating a circular, open flow, connecting the ground floor living spaces by tying all of the rooms together through rounded cabinetry that flows from the front entrance into the kitchen, the circular room, back into the kitchen and ending in



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thing everyone involved in the project can appreciate, but it's the story of before and after that the architects love the most.

"We achieved a massive transformation without actually tearing the house down," says Arbib. "People can't believe how much it had changed. But to us, the accomplishment was that we didn't raze the house or add square footage. We just reimagined it with big moves."

"Austin has a lot of beautiful architecture that is really expensive," adds Hughey. "For us, it was about making a powerful transformation without breaking the bank."

For Kaoru and Yuriko, it's about enjoying the lifestyle their home affords, now more open and less compartmentalized than ever before. Even with their children out of the house, the extra space is not overwhelming because the design is simple, sophisticated and functional.

"We feel wabi-sabi living in this house," says Kaoru. "Wabi-sabi is the Japanese sense of beauty, which means 'beauty from simplicity.'" ♦

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