



# Harmony in the Hill Country

By Mauri Elbel | Photography by Andrea Calo

*Randi and Taylor Tatsch have always shared an appreciation for mid-century modern design and wide open spaces. Taylor, a musician and sound engineer, grew up on a cattle ranch and Randi, a certified yoga and Barre3 instructor, was raised in her home with plenty of acreage all around. Considering their mutual affinities, the couple is finally at home, surrounded by uninterrupted Hill Country views that stretch as far as the eye can see, in the modern mid-century house they share with their two little boys, ages 3 and 4, and two family dogs.*



**H**ailing from the Dallas-Fort Worth area, it was the combined desire to be closer to nature and Austin's thriving music industry that brought the couple to the bucolic rolling hills just outside of the city. After purchasing a 10-acre rustic Hill Country lot just west of Austin's bustle, the couple hired architect Nick Mehl of Element 5 Architecture to design their dream home. While the project was a couple of years in the making, impeded by the happy welcoming of two back-to-back babies, the vision for what they wanted never wavered: a mid-century modern home where they could raise their growing family, with a detached professional recording studio that would allow Taylor to work from home.

"Many people say they want mid-century modern design without understanding exactly what that is," says Mehl. "But not these clients — they really did understand and appreciate mid-century modern design for what it is."

Embodying the simple, classic and timeless nature of mid-century design, Mehl designed a modest 2,300-square-

foot, four-bedroom, three-bathroom family house with a detached 1,300-square-foot recording studio on the flat area of land at the peak of their site. Because the landscape of the Hill Country can be wild and unforgiving, Mehl oriented the home to turn inward on a lush and tame courtyard while the surrounding site could be left undisturbed — a move that not only worked with their limited budget but created a sense of authenticity with the surrounding landscape.

"My husband opens all the windows and we just listen to the sounds of birds and wildlife — it is just so wonderful and peaceful," says Randi. "Being outdoors has always been super important for us, and here in Austin there are so many opportunities to enjoy beautiful outdoor spaces — we feel so lucky there is one opportunity right in our backyard, too. A few times a week we take our boys on a little nature walk in the back, which is a lot of fun."

The simple layout of the house, built by Zach Savage Custom Homes, is essentially a large square roof with a hole in the middle for the courtyard, explains Mehl. At night, the opening in the roof frames a star-studded sky. During the day, Randi



sic studio, designed as a professional-quality recording room equipped with a kitchenette, bathroom and sleeping loft for visiting musicians. Taylor found recycled barn wood to use for the wall siding, which not only adds to the rustic charm and character of the studio, but also provides a sense of place in the heart of the Texas Hill Country while enhancing acoustics.

"When it comes to sound engineering, he didn't want to have any walls parallel or perpendicular to each other — they are all slightly faceted for optimum acoustics," says Mehl. "Overall, it is a pretty nice recording studio. It's become a destination for many visiting musicians and family, all of whom call

says it's one of the boys' favorite areas to play — a space filled with sunlight that serves as an extension of the house and makes the space feel larger than it actually is. Mehl pared the design down with a low-pitched roof gable and deep overhanging back porch. A floor-to-ceiling window wall in the vaulted great room adds to the spacious feel while bringing 20- to 30-mile, north-facing views directly into the home. Signature of Element 5 Architecture's design approach, the structure takes into consideration the views and solar orientation so there is no need for artificial shading or privacy.

"In this house, windows can stay open without coverings," says Mehl. "And while solar orientation is always very important, it just so happened their awesome view faces north so the orientation worked out great."

Taylor dictated acoustical perfection in his detached mu-

this special place their home away from home."

Inside the main home, Randi's favorite space is the kitchen. With her passion for nutrition-focused baking and cooking, she says she loves that she can walk in from the garage with groceries and straight into the pantry and kitchen.

"The kitchen is the heart of our home and the place where we spend most of our time — we use it constantly," she says. "Nutrition is really important to us and we try to be as healthy as we can, especially with kids. They are such good little eaters."

Because Randi knew how important the kitchen would be to their lifestyle, this was the section of the home she splurged on in an otherwise limited budget, selecting beautiful walnut kitchen cabinets and finishes while backing off in other areas of the home. But despite the home's modest budget and size, nothing is lacking.



“I really feel like Nick shined at using every square inch of space,” says Randi. “It is only about 2,300 square feet but it feels so much bigger than that.”

Keeping true with mid-century modern style, natural material selections such as the stacked brick around the fireplace that continues seamlessly to the exterior, low-maintenance concrete floors, and natural wood walls and ceilings allow the views to do all of the talking without the need for statement finishes and décor.

“Keeping the house a simple shape and finding a flat place on the property to build both kept the costs down,” says Mehl. “We didn’t do anything special — it is really just about the creative use of materials.”

Built-in shelving and desks prevent clutter and the need for additional furniture pieces while large windows grace the home with gorgeous views while limiting the need for extra lighting and décor.

“We are sort of minimalists so everything for us has to be functional and beautiful; otherwise, we don’t bring it into the house,” says Randi. “We actually designed the house that way — we wanted a big open space to spend most of our time in. And we just wanted the materials to be how they were and not cover anything up — we have lots of wood that is just clear-coated, there is brick on the walls and concrete on the floors.”

Above all, the design speaks to the way the clients live — it’s

simple, functional and durable enough to withstand the constant pattering of little feet and paws — and proves a home can be stunning without costing millions. Of course, you can’t put a price on those million dollar views.

“It is pretty mesmerizing,” says Mehl of the family’s uninterrupted Hill Country views. “You really can’t get your eyes off that view when you are up there.” ♦

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