

Change of Plans

By Dan R. Goddard | Photography by Dror Baldinger



Living with the changing light of the day is a new way of life for Randy and Julie Stevens. Although the couple only moved a couple of blocks within their longtime Midland neighborhood, they went from a house with a north/south axis to one with an east/west orientation, which makes the West Texas sunrises and sunsets much more spectacular and the noontime sun more intense. So, the Stevens asked Austin-based Jackson & McElhaney Architects — Mike McElhaney, AIA, and Robert Jackson, FAIA — to make their renovated home “open and airy.”



Walls of glass in the front and back along with clerestories in the open-design living room and kitchen allows indirect washes of natural light to bathe the interior. “We love our spacious kitchen-den area because we are cooks and love to have friends and family over, and functions at our home,” Julie Stevens says. “We also love how this house, situated east-west, has made us appreciate and become much more aware of our beautiful West Texas

skies — sunrises and sunsets and all the sky in between.” The Stevens have lived in Midland since 1981 and, while they’ve experienced lots of ups and downs in the oil business, the city currently has a population of 180,000 and is growing thanks to the Permian Basin oil and gas boom. As empty nesters in 2013, they purchased a nearby house in their Warwick neighborhood built in 1958 by a prominent Midland pediatrician and his wife. The house is just two blocks from the home where the Stevens raised three children.

“Robert and Mike came to Midland in early 2013 and we

made several trips to meet with them in their offices in Austin,” Julie says. “We also did a lot of emailing back and forth. Our interior designer, Karen Greiner, worked in trio with Robert and Mike during the entire process. Alix Knauth, an Austin designer specializing in lighting, was also an integral player in our design plan.”

But the renovation project was much more complicated than the Stevens expected. The original 1958 house had red brick the Stevens learned could not be matched. So, they decided to replace the brick. But once the old bricks were re-



moved, extensive termite damage was discovered. Ultimately, about all that remains of the original house is the foundation.

“My most important goal was to have a home built that ‘fit’ into our established neighborhood,” Julie says. “We also wanted spacious, but well-thought-out areas for cooking and entertaining and several smaller, cozy spaces for reading/quiet time, plus a roomy, upstairs exercise area, offices and a

large garage with bike storage. We kept the original foundation of the 1958 house and added on a considerable amount of square footage and 10-12-foot ceilings to meet our goals. The clerestories added very distinctive and useful natural light elements.”

Clerestories allow natural light deep into the middle of the house. “A clerestory is a window above eye level,” Rob-





ert Jackson says. “Often clerestories are somewhat protected from direct sun by overhangs to help bring indirect light into a building.” Both the living room and kitchen areas in the open floor plan have large clerestory elements. Sitting atop the roof like glass boxes, the clerestories convey an abundance of diffused light inside, while giving a nod to the street that is a blend of traditional and contemporary architecture.

More common along the East Coast and in Europe, two gable-end bays that framed the entry were the most distinctive

architectural elements of the 1958 home. The Stevens wanted to retain the familiar look of the earlier home while maintaining a modest, friendly scale appropriate to the neighborhood. In the renovated design, Jackson & McElhaney reinforced the twin bay composition with a full-height glass wall between these two entry “bookends” to connect the interior vestibule to the porch and yard.

“Because most of the original wall locations did not conform to the owners’ needs, we re-organized all rooms with the ex-

ception of the three guest bedrooms on the north side of the home,” Jackson says. “We wanted the home to open to the small garden-like yard, so large glass walls reinforce this connection, both from the living spaces and the kitchen.” The entry vestibule opens into the expansive entertaining and dining area. More intimate rooms such as the library, family room, breakfast nook and study provide variety and balance. These public spaces are bounded by the master bedroom on one side and three bedrooms on the other. The three interior walls of



the living/kitchen area and the courtyard privacy wall along the rear of the yard create the feeling of one, large interior/exterior room.

The interior design by Karen Greiner Interiors of Austin is simple and refined to complement the restrained materials and massing of the architecture. “It was important to the Stevens that their home would be comfortable and allow them to entertain and host friends, family and groups throughout the year,” Greiner says. “The client is a fabulous cook and hostess, so the kitchen and main living areas were designed to be the hub of the home. We designed a custom pastry run, cook top areas, and specialized details based on the way she operates in the kitchen. It was important to utilize their existing art, antiques and special pieces while incorporating newer additions as well.”

The Stevens’ love of natural light guided Greiner’s palette employing blues, green, off whites and random pops of color. Almost entirely natural linens, cottons and fibers were used throughout the house, contrasting with steel doors and windows. “Karen was absolutely amazing and pulled together the entire project,” Julie says. “She listened to our wants and was brilliant at guiding us toward a beautifully decorated, comfortable house that we think will stand the test of time.”

Curt Arnette of Sitio Design Group designed the back yard and the landscape planting and low walls in the front yard, creating a cozy environment and focus for the living areas of the home, while successfully screening the alley behind the property. A simple plunge pool and multiple seating areas allow plenty of attractive spaces for entertaining. The low walls at the front entry help create a transitional space as you approach the front door. The walls off the master bedroom are slightly taller and

create an intimate sitting area with a sense of privacy.

The general contractor on the project, JCC Partners of Midland, had remodeled the Stevens’ former home in 2001. The design team quickly established a good working relationship with the contractor and kept the communication flowing during construction, despite the long distance between Austin and Midland.

McElhane says every effort was made to salvage as much of the existing home as possible. “Attempts were made to salvage the existing framing, however the termite damage, undersized rafters and low plate heights necessitated new framing,” he says. “Fortunately, we were able to salvage the concrete foundation so that it didn’t get hauled off to the landfill. We added on to the foundation where necessary for new square footage. Other sustainable items include extensive natural daylighting, large overhangs shading west-facing glass, and increased insulation value of the envelope.” The home’s electrical, plumbing and HVAC systems were completely replaced throughout, because they needed to be updated per current codes.

“Since we finished building this home in 2017, I have lost count of the number of people who have told us that this is the prettiest house in Midland,” Julie says. “Our three children, spouses and grandchildren live in New York City, Waco and Houston. We have lots of comfortable space when our family visits and they all love that the spacious guest bedrooms have en suite bathrooms!” ♦

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