

AUSTIN HOME

Austin & The Hill Country

DESIGN DARLINGS

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URBAN LIVING

Nine Essentials
For a Timeless
Downtown Loft



A modern living room with a large window overlooking a landscape. The room features a grey sofa with white and red pillows, a wooden coffee table, and a large rug. A ceiling fan is visible above the sofa. The text "Bringing Into View" is overlaid on the image.

Bringing Into View



The design of a home west of Austin takes advantage of the property's best asset



Almost a decade

has passed since Jim Christian and his wife, Dieu, purchased an empty lot in Belvedere, a neighborhood on Hamilton Pool Road west of Austin. There's a 4,400-square-foot contemporary home on that lot now. But one thing about the lot hasn't changed: the view.

Perched high on a hillside and facing west, the home has a clear panorama of the wooded, rolling Hill Country terrain.

"It's kind of neat that as you move from one end of the house to the other, it's like a different framed picture in every room," Christian says. "You're really sitting high and looking out over the whole world. The sunsets are fantastic, and thunderstorms are really cool to watch from up there."

The Christians' four-bedroom house—which is the work of a team that includes the Geschke Group architecture firm, Laura Burton Interiors and Enve Builders—is designed to make the most of the view while also incorporating the Christians' other desires: an open concept with clean lines, a modern design without being cold, neutral tones and colors throughout the house and energy efficiency.

The project began with architect Kai Geschke determining how and where to place the house on its hillside setting.

"The biggest challenge was the site," he recalls. "It's a severe slope. With a lot like that, if we don't do a [proper] design we're pouring tens of thousands of dollars into concrete and getting nothing out of it. So the question was, How do we best use what we've been given so it's cost-effective and attractive?"

Placing the house on the lot to save as many of the property's existing trees as possible was another significant consideration in Geschke's design.

"We didn't want to clear-cut everything and do a traditional house," he says. "It was, How do we minimally impact the site and keep as many trees as we can?"

He drew up an "upside-down" concept that from the front appears to be a single-story house. The main level holds most of the home's living areas: the kitchen, dining space, great room, study, master suite, guest bedroom and laundry. The lower level has the two other bedrooms, a game room and its own patio.

That's a perfect arrangement for the Christians, who have two older children. (One lives in Seattle; the another is a high school senior.) With Geschke's design everything the family uses most is on the main floor.



The main living area (above) features a cedar wall that provides warmth to a space that predominantly has a neutral color palette; from the outside (opposite), the house looks like a one-story structure, but Geschke's upside-down design places some living spaces on the lower level, which are hidden from the front of the house.





And it's the view from the main floor that steals the show. Walk into the home's main entrance and onto the patio, and you're instantly 20 feet in the air, looking out over acres of the pristine Hill Country. The view isn't restricted to the balcony, however. Throughout the main living area large windows punctuate the walls so that the outside beauty is the main focal point of the space.

Letting in the westward views without also allowing the Texas sunlight to bake the house was another challenge. Overhangs, awnings and deep porches help mitigate the effects of the sun. And the home's 10-foot-high windows are energy-efficient in order to lessen solar impact.

Other green-building elements aren't as visible but boost the house's efficiency: multistage HVAC system, tankless water heater, energy-efficient appliances and a spray-foam insulation in the walls and roof. That insulation means the HVAC equipment and ductwork are protected from extreme heat and cold that traditional attic spaces withstand, also bringing energy use down. The benefits have already been obvious. Christian says the family's energy bills have been lower than those in their previous home, even though it was a smaller house.

The home's green features also include interior pieces from environmentally conscious companies: Lee Industries made the sectional in the living area, Palecek designed the tree-trunk coffee tables and the wool rug comes from Black Sheep Unique.

Aesthetically, to satisfy the Christians' desire for a home that fits into the Hill Country surroundings and has a timeless look, the architecture

A rare stonewood quartzite countertop on the kitchen island (above) provides visual interest and served as inspiration for other pieces in the space, including the gray-green cabinets; the wavy limestone tile backsplash (opposite) adds texture to the kitchen.



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eschews traditional, vertical elements that feel manmade and instead uses horizontal lines that blend with the horizon.

The interior is also all about taking advantage of the open, airy and natural feel of the home. To maintain that feel while also adding elements of visual and textural interest, interior designer Laura Burton extended Geschke’s clean, exterior lines to the living spaces and punctuated them with a few standout pieces.

A large, circular Ralph Lauren light fixture over the dining table is a focal piece that helps define the area within the open-layout space. Minimal, streamlined pendant lights over the kitchen island offer a contrast to the larger fixture.

“You have to be so aware of those selections in an open space, or else it gets visually cluttered,” Burton says.

The stonewood quartzite countertop on the kitchen island is another focal point with its patterns and variations that complement the neutral



palette of the house. With the other kitchen countertops a solid gray, the island countertop doesn't add a feeling of clutter to the space.

"We pulled a lot of our color inspiration from the island countertop," Burton says. The gray-green in the cabinets, for example, was taken from the quartzite.

In addition, accent lighting defines spaces in a clean and unfussy way. LED cove lighting over the living and dining area adds a subtle perimeter.

Burton's work also gives the home a Texas feel without getting heavy; there's no dark wood, antlers or cowhide here. Wavy limestone tile on the backsplash behind the stove and horizontal clear cedar planks on the living room wall add Texas touches and give more texture to some of the spaces.

"It really has been a good thing," Jim Christian says of the house. "It's a much different feeling than the standard suburban tract home we were in before this. Having the high ceilings, the view, and the expansiveness—I've found it really good for my psyche." ▲

Like the rest of the house, the master bedroom (opposite) features European white oak floors; with the windows in the master bathroom (above) facing the Hill Country, privacy is not an issue, so window treatments aren't necessary.