

AUSTIN + HILL COUNTRY

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WRITTEN BY KIMBERLY OLSON | PHOTOGRAPHY BY ROBERT RECK

AS THE NORTHERN EDGE OF SAN ANTONIO GENTLY MERGES INTO TEXAS HILL COUNTRY, ROLLING PRAIRIES DOTTED WITH TOWERING OAKS AND BLANKETS OF CANDY-COLORED WILDFLOWERS INDUBitably MARK THE LANDSCAPE. So when a couple decided to build a home there, in the community of Leon Springs, they vowed to take full advantage of their environment. They wanted to do more than just admire the area's natural beauty, though—they wanted to help protect it. So they turned to the architects at Lake|Flato, a firm well known for dwellings that pay tribute to the landscape and are sustainable to boot.

The homeowners had raised their daughter in a large traditional home filled with equally traditional furnishings. Now empty nesters with an eye toward retirement, they were ready to pare down. "They wanted to simplify their lives," says project manager Jennifer Young. "Clean lines and a connection to the outdoors were high on the wish list."

**ARCHITECTURE** Ted Flato, FAIA, Karla Greer, AIA,

and Jennifer Young, LEED AP, Lake|Flato Architects

**INTERIOR DESIGN** Debbie Baxter, ASID, Baxter Design Group

**HOME BUILDER** Glen Duecker, Duecker Construction Company, Inc.

**BEDROOMS** 3 **BATHROOMS** 4 **SQUARE FEET** 3,250







**FLOOR SHOW**

Chairs from A. Rudin offer perches in which to sit and take in the view from the living room. A custom coffee table by designer Debbie Baxter sports a honed marble top and stainless-steel detailing. The guitar pick-shaped table near the window is by Ted Boerner.



#### **NATURE WALK**

The home's entry area features outdoor seating, thick plantings and Oklahoma flagstone underfoot. Grand doors made of slatted custom rift-sawn white oak blend nicely with the surrounding limestone, quarried from Luaders.

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Young and her colleagues designed a modestly sized home and a separate guesthouse joined by a loggia, creating a campus-like environment. "They didn't want a typical house," says architect and firm partner Karla Greer of her clients. "They wanted something that engaged more with the land. The buildings create courtyards and exterior spaces, and you got to travel outside to access different parts. In a sense, we've taken a smaller home and pulled it apart, so they can enjoy more of the site."

"One of the most important aspects of building a green house is building less," adds architect and firm principal Ted Flain. "The idea was to create just the amount of space that they would use. And the guesthouse is a separate structure, so when no one's visiting, it gets turned off."



**TABLE DISCUSSION**

The dining area is outfitted with Holly Hunt chairs and a walnut slab table with a steel base, found at Scott+Cooner. The flooring is made from locally harvested end-grain mesquite blocks, sourced and installed by Original Wood Floors.



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The property features several outdoor living spaces, including a porch off the guesthouse and a sleeping porch off the master bedroom, where the couple slumber when the weather allows, which is most of the year. "Those porches are really special," Young says. "The views are amazing, and the breezes are awesome."

The homeowners take full advantage of nature's air conditioning, as well as Mother Earth's other gifts, from sun to rain. "The home has solar panels, geothermal pumps and a rainwater collection system," says builder Glen Duercker. "The house is planned to work with the contours of the land, and it feels very peaceful and serene," Greer adds. "The land has been minimally disturbed to let the structure just lightly fit onto it."

#### SIMPLE RECIPE

White oak cabinets and honed Lueders limestone countertops create an aura of relaxed simplicity in the kitchen. The mobile-style light fixture above the island is by David Week's Studio; the bar stools are by A. Radin. Eco-smart appliances are from Bosch and Sub-Zero.



**BARE NECESSITIES**

The clean lines of an upholstered platform bed designed by Baxter reflect the master suite's clutter-free aesthetic. Bedside lamps are by Phoenix Day, purchased at E.C. Dickter. The tufted leather bench is from Kravet; the handmade wool rug is by Odgaard.





#### LIMITED EXPOSURE

In a corner of the master bedroom, an R. Jones armchair and ottoman, found at ID Collection, encourages window-side lounging. The homeowners sleep in the room's adjacent screened porch when weather allows.

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"We're fine-tuning the energy usage, and, hopefully, this home will eventually become completely independent of the local supply," Young says. "The rainwater collected here provides 100 percent of the clients' potable indoor water. Last year, it even got them through a record drought. Every time it rained, I'd think about the water filling up their cisterns."

The team also used green materials, many locally sourced. The home's stone veneer is limestone from Luaders, for example, and much of the flooring is mesquite, which long ago paved the streets of San Antonio. "No one thinks of mesquite as a building material, because it's just a gnarly,



#### **SMOOTH SAILING**

Sun sails suspended over the poolside deck wave rhythmically in gentle breezes. The swimming pool, built by Keith Zare Pools, was designed to blend seamlessly with the surrounding stone. Windows by Kalbe Windows & Doors.

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tough little tree," Flato says. "But when you cut it into slabs, you get these great blocks." These efforts and others ultimately earned the home its LEED Platinum certification, the highest rating for sustainable building.

And while the house may be half the size of the couple's former residence, they don't notice, thanks to the open living spaces and lofty ceilings. To finish out the interiors, they called on designer Debbie Baxter, who created earthy, scaled-back spaces. "They wanted the interior to be a response to the architecture, which is my goal in everything I do," Baxter says. "I chose the palette from the vistas outside those big windows, so there would be an integration of nature and what was inside the house."





**OPEN CALL**

The entry patio of this San Antonio-area residence, designed by Lake/Flato Architects and built by Quecker Construction, offers natural views and comfy seating. A cushy sofa and tables by Kingsley-Bate are joined by complementary accents from Janus et Cie.



#### **DOWN HOME**

Exposed steel and limestone are right at home amid the area's rugged natural beauty. The skillion roof has overhang that provide shading from the bright Texas sun. The house follows the site's slope, allowing gravity to help feed rainwater to collection cisterns below.

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Giving a nod to Texas Hill Country, Baxter chose furnishings such as a leather cowhide chair and a coffee table made of limestone, which is common to the area. The couple often spend time with family, so another priority was comfort and warmth. "All of the building materials are hard surfaces, so I made sure there was plushness and comfort in the seating, without it being overly done," Baxter says.





**SUSTAINED IMPACT**

Landscape architect Sarah Westkaemper Lake created a screen of cedar and Arizona cypress on the property, bringing forth a living wall of green and silver. The home's eco-smart design and construction have significantly tempered its outside energy usage and helped its owners weather a record drought.