

GOOD VIBRATIONS

By **SHARLA BELL** | Photography by **MATTHEW NIEMANN, ABERDEEN STUDIOS**

As the child of a devoted Beach Boys fan, I willingly admit that, thanks to my father, much of my life plays to an internal soundtrack that includes “Barbara Ann” and “Kokomo.” So, when I strolled up the front walk of the Mattern & FitzGerald Parade Home in The Aragon in The Dominion last May, it was not surprising that “Good Vibrations” began playing through my head. Reminiscent of a Malibu beach house circa 1972, this home exudes California cool lovingly re-imagined in a Hill Country setting.

What I learned when I sat down with builder Kevin FitzGerald of Mattern & FitzGerald Custom Builders and designer Debbie Baxter, ASID, IIDA, of Baxter Design Group, is that this is no accident. Rather, the laid back, soulful architecture and design of this home is the result of an incredibly intense five months of soaking up their clients’ hopes, dreams, and yes, even their vibe, and turning it into a home that evokes their very essence.

The couple at the heart of this project approached FitzGerald with the possibility of building a home on a lot they had fallen in love with — that just happened to be on the Parade street. FitzGerald, a veteran of Parade homes, knew that building a home on this street meant that the cost would increase but so would the financial incentives inherent with this level of scrutiny. Still, the clients were very clear: “We were on a budget. I think the quote was, ‘if we can’t do this house for that price, then forget it.’” And FitzGerald, Baxter and the architect Robert A. Lopez, AIA, of Lopez Salas Architects, Inc., were up for the challenge. According to Fitzgerald, the clients “wanted a house with soul and natural materials that were understated, yet elegant. We chose to design and build a home that would be low on ‘stuff’ and rich on texture.”





style architecture” which recognizes that each area of the home is distinct in function and also, then, distinct in style — as a way to mesh the homeowners’ wish for open, airy spaces with everyone’s desire to capitalize on the beautiful views afforded by the piece of property on which the house would sit. Each pod is centered around its purpose: the main living pavilion is “the heart of the home,” with the kitchen, dining, breakfast and living spaces completely open without any interior walls. Without impeding walls, the homeowners have fantastic views of both the front and rear of the home. The kids’ and guests’ suites make up another pod, allowing for noise control from the main living area and assuring that many restful nights’ sleep would remain uninterrupted. While the kids sleep downstairs, the guest suite is upstairs in this pod, and opens to incredible vistas. FitzGerald says the view toward the back of the property is amazing at sunset.

Finally, the master suite and media area make up the third pod. “The media room is just off the front door and has a separate master vestibule in between it and the master living to offer sound respite. The master also features a custom spiral stairway that leads up to a private study. This gives it a “tree house” effect with views overlooking the pool and Hill Country. We purposely angled this wing to the left a little to not only create more space but also to concentrate on views from this pod. We have one window that has a view through a spa water feature with the firepit in the back drop all on the same axis, and of course, the main view when first walking in to the master suite is the pool going under the home with the LED lights that show this engineering marvel off.” FitzGerald gets understandably excited when he starts explaining the fruits of their labor — including the fact that part of the main pavilion living area is cantilevered out over the pool — but more on that later!

Each of these pods is connected to another by a passageway, a kind of bridge, made mostly of glass, and allowing for seamless, yet perceptible, transitions from main living space to relaxing and retiring spaces. This pod concept also allowed for the exterior of the home to take shape in the design team’s mind’s eye.

Meanwhile, Baxter, along with design partner Holly Hickey Moore, was getting to know “the delightful clients,” who wanted a laid back, comfortable home. “As designers, we wanted to keep the furnishings and finishes organic, clean lined and whimsical — young and comfortable — in line with the architecture and the site, a restrained interior.” FitzGerald credits Baxter with bestowing the appellation of “Malibu circa 1972” as the goal and vision for the home. She says the idea came directly from spending time with the homeowners; she saw them “enjoying a low-slung, organic home with an easy vibe, modern without being industrial,” a home that could have been found on the upscale California coastline.

One other important element of the home came out of that initial meeting: the idea that the roof of the home should appear to “float.” “The floating roof is a concept that employs high windows that are close to the roof line, which we call clerestory windows, to appear to go from inside the home to out. It essentially connects you to that feature, and we spent a ton of time trying to figure out how to best do that while keeping true to codes and best practice,” explains FitzGerald. Another effect of clerestory windows: they allow more light to come in and really open up a space, which was key for these clients.



Upon the first meeting with this design-build team of architect, designer, builder and homeowners, the professionals listened to the couple describe, with illustrated book in hand, the kinds of architecture they gravitated towards: “every picture showed modern, clean lines, open loft spaces, and texture, lots of texture.” When asked what he means by texture, FitzGerald explains, “Texture is a term we use to describe the elements that we place on the walls. Wallpaper, cork, wood slats, rock, exposed rafters, exposed ducts; the list goes on and on. It’s more fun to be creative with different walls than just the sheetrock that everyone has. Of course, there’s a cost to that so you have to be careful, but consider materials that are both readily available and elegant. That was one of the strategies for this home.”

While listening at that initial meeting, several things happened at once. The architect began to conceptualize “pod-



As this process of envisioning the home and then making it reality continued, some truly unique design features began to evolve. For both FitzGerald and Baxter, the main living pavilion is a favorite space. For FitzGerald, it is “the beauty and craftsmanship of the space. We were challenged to come up with ‘wow’ features that didn’t break the bank. One example is the “faced” New Mexico dry stack stone added to the interior living room wall. This rich texture coupled with the stain-grade, exposed roof creates a feeling that will never go stale.” Another ‘wow’ feature is the massive, custom-made metal firebox that defines the dining room and living room. The double-sided box means that one can look straight through it, and the ribbon flame dances to and fro, creating ambiance throughout the living area. “The best part is as night falls, the space becomes more and more magical due to all of the rich texture on the walls and ceilings. The sun sets, the shadows dance and the space comes alive.”

For Baxter, the kitchen is irresistible, and epitomizes successful design. “The layering of our selected finishes on the architecture is comparable to a well dressed person who has dressed for comfort, but looks totally, effortlessly put together. I love the kitchen — the huge, oversized island, anchored on the bamboo floors, with the sculptural walnut stools layered against the white, horizontal walls and fabulous Anne Saks tile backsplash. It brings all the right elements into one panoramic expanse.”

And one thing that will never get old in the main pavilion is standing in the back left corner and knowing that you are suspended out and over the backyard pool. This idea, to cantilever a portion of the house above the pool, originated from the architect. Lopez thought that this was the perfect opportunity to introduce a Frank Lloyd Wright type of feature that would be enjoyed from both inside and outside the house. FitzGerald recalls, “A phone call was made from the desk of the planning meeting to the engineer who told us it could be done. We started there because I knew if we could get the foundation right, the pool would be fine as well.”

For both Baxter and FitzGerald, the budget was a challenge, but one that they overcame with style. Baxter explains, “We had to be very discriminating in our choices, and we spent our resources on things that they would keep, custom making many of the primary pieces to keep costs in line as well as providing craftsmanship we knew we could trust and stand behind.” And FitzGerald echoes this, “As with all homes, we strive to make sure that the homeowner gets the best visual return possible for the dollars allocated for the project. We try our best to listen to our clients and put the dollars in the areas that are most important to them.” And Parade home or not, this sounds like most excellent advice when building a dream. ❖

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