

HOME

AUSTIN

THE DESIGN ISSUE



THE HOT LIST

OUR ANNUAL RUNDOWN OF THE BUZZIEST PEOPLE, PLACES, PRODUCTS AND TRENDS

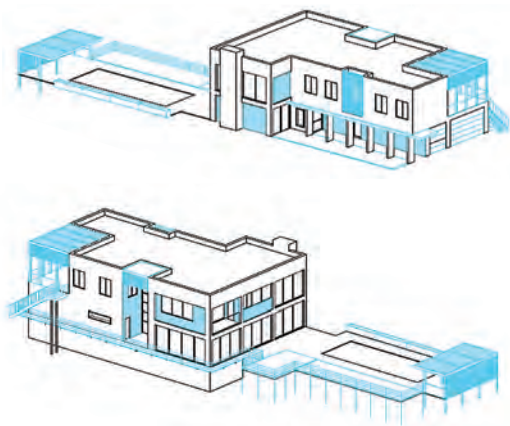
PLUS

IT-BOY DESIGNER
JONATHAN ADLER FINDS AUSTIN
ARTIST LANCE LETSCHER HITS HIS MARK
AN AIA HOMES TOUR STUNNER
& SIX TO-DIE-FOR INTERIORS

Through A Glass **BRIGHTLY**

TWO UT PROFS HEAD
INTO THE WOODS
WITH A YOUNG TECHIE
AND FIND A FOREST
OF DISCOVERY

By **RAMONA FLUME**
Photography by **PAUL FINKEL**



If you grew up in Central Texas, chances are you spent a great deal of your childhood playing in the woods. You'd waste hours under the shade of giant tree branches, playing Swiss Family Robinson in homemade tree forts and making cool discoveries about bugs and how dirty you can make your blue jeans. For some, those days never got old.

That's the case for a young techie, who, in 2009, set



out on a search for a new home. He became totally captivated by a contemporary two-story house nearly hidden by ancient oak trees in the Northwest Hills. Myriad floor-to-ceiling windows in the house made walking through the space feel like a stroll through the woods. He was sold. And that's when the cool discoveries began.

The homeowner, a local tech-industry entrepreneur who got his start in software development and who asked to



anonymous, approached Austin-based husband and wife architects Ulrich Dangel and Tami Glass, who own the firm Glass and Dangel, and who are professors at the UT School of Architecture, to help with a remodel of the house. Soon, through their research, the architects discovered that the unique home in the forest was an original design by famed local architect Alan Taniguchi, the former dean of UT's architecture school and former director of Rice University's School of Architecture.

Looking through the floor-to-ceiling windows from the back patio, the house looks like an open art gallery.





THIS PAGE When closed, the bar becomes an oak-veneered wall. Barstools from RAD Furniture flank a cantilever kitchen island.

OPPOSITE PAGE The living room is airy, with a custom chandelier and wood-burning fireplace.

They were both already familiar with Taniguchi's work, since the architect, who died in 1998, was an eminent influence on the mid-century modern home designs of the lower Rio Grande Valley. His father, Isamu, was responsible for the creation of the Japanese garden at Zilker Botanical Gardens, a style that influenced his son's adoption of expertly creating spaces that are in tune with their surrounding environments.

"We felt privileged and honored to work on one of their projects," Glass says. "We feel like the success of our work was because we had such a great base to build upon."

As they pressed on, they unearthed more gems about the site. They found the house had won a Texas Society of Architects Award in 1982 and discovered that Evan Taniguchi, Alan's son, was also an architect who still had a small firm in Austin. When they reached out to him, Evan was able to locate parts of the original hand-drawn sketches to give Dangel and Glass insight into the house's origins.

It turned out that the Northwest Hills house was one of the last projects that the father-son Taniguchi team worked on before Alan's death. "Evan was sweet about everything and just told us to be kind to the house," Glass says.

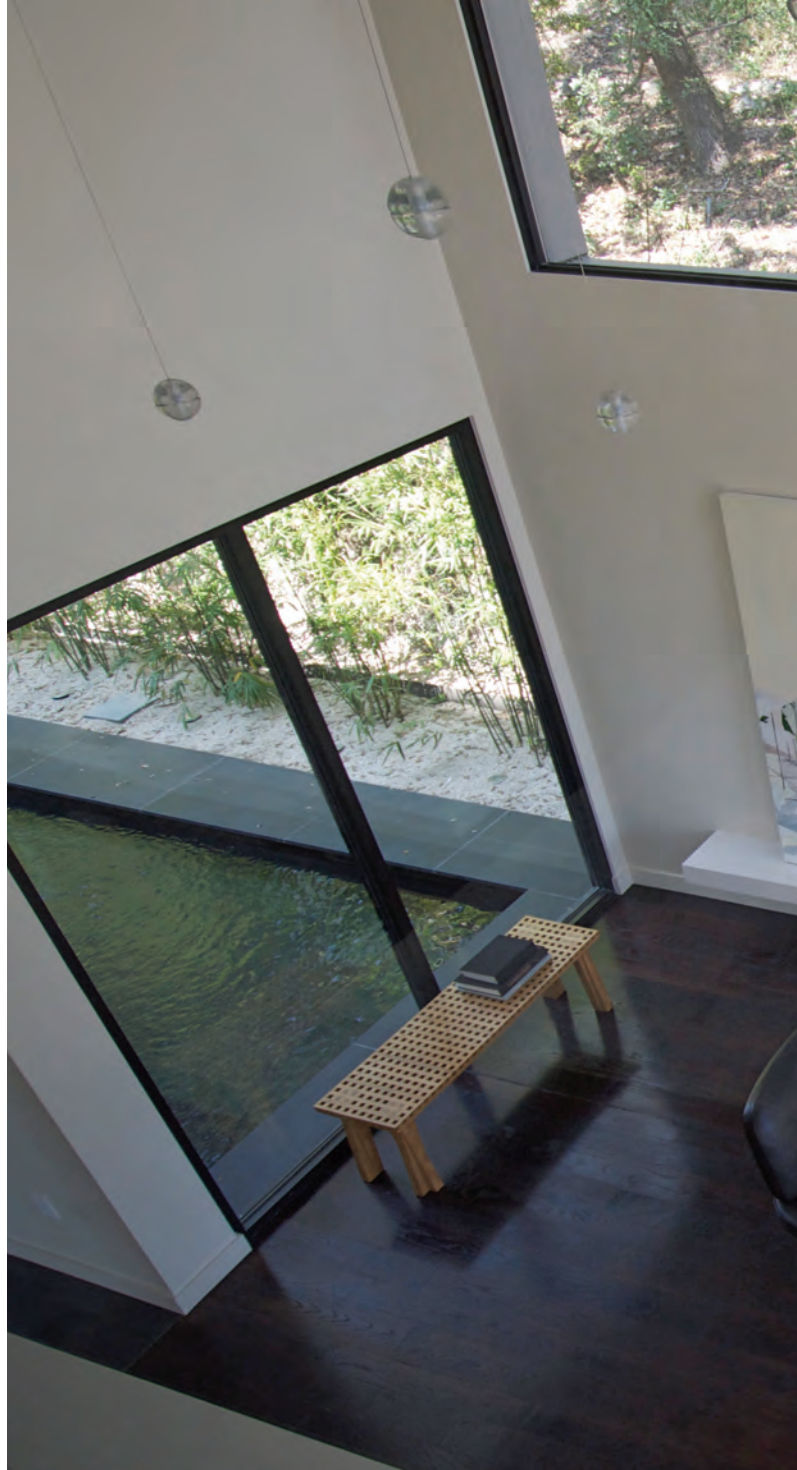
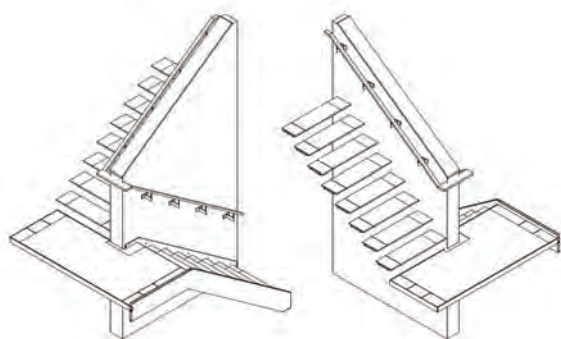
The Taniguchi design that integrated the space with the landscape meshed well with the new homeowner and provided the groundwork for Dangel and Glass's plans to knock down the walls of the existing small, intimate spaces and expand the low ceilings and ribbon windows that were leftover from the '80s. Since the homeowner isn't a typical nine-to-five kind of office guy, he wanted something that was full of open interior spaces that mingled with the wooded outdoor setting so that he could work on his laptop on the living room sofa just as comfortably as on the back patio lounge under the trees.

"He wanted to see everything," Glass says. "He wanted these very special indoor/outdoor moments."



THIS PAGE The gun-blown steel and glass staircase allows for an easy, translucent view through the unique structure.

OPPOSITE PAGE High ceilings and large windows create an intimate vibe with the surrounding woods.



And the big moments happen when in view of the backyard space, where mature oaks shade a bamboo-lined swimming pool and large sun deck. Every room in the two-story home offers a unique view of the landscaped surrounding. (There is little to no art hanging on the interior walls. The show is outside.)

Take the entryway, for example. A walkway to the front door is punctuated with a row of columns that run parallel to a bamboo-lined rectangular reflection pond and, once inside, the low ceilings of the foyer create an almost tunneled vision to the leafy backyard. In the original floorplan, a staircase with white-plaster walls blocked this stellar view. Dangel and Glass fixed this problem by designing a somewhat camouflaged staircase of steel and glass—with casual-cool brown leather treads for where feet step—that allows you to see



straight through the two-story window of the living room to the backyard.

And although he had assembled a top-notch team to complete his new home, the brainy homeowner didn't just want to hear about the design. He wanted proof, Dangel says. For instance, with those leather-wrapped steps, Dangel and Glass made a full-scale mock-up of one tread and used it in their home as the welcome mat, stepping on it every day over the course of a few months, in every kind of shoe and weather, to test the precise kind of wear and tear they could expect.

"We wanted the design to be dressy when it needed to be," Glass says. "But also casual and relaxed on a daily basis."

The kitchen and dining-slash-living areas were originally separate, closed spaces with limited exterior views. If you

were in the kitchen, all you saw were the kitchen walls. After some upgrades, though, the homeowner can now sip his coffee while standing in front of floor-to-ceiling windows that look out to the shaded back patio.

There is a glass shower in the master bathroom that's of epic proportions—"You can fit 12 people in that shower, the whole soccer team!" Dangel says—with a mirror above the sink that can slide aside to reveal a window into the woods.

Rooftop patios accessible from both the bathroom and master bedroom allow for even more intimate outdoor experiences, like reading the morning paper with only the thick overhanging oak boughs as company or sharing a glass of wine with a friend as the sun goes down.

In fact, next to the connection with the trees, entertaining





was the most important factor in redesigning the house. The new open floorplan means the homeowner can be mixing cocktails at the free-standing kitchen island while still able to see his guests lingering over an after-dinner drink in the formal dining room on one side and friends huddled in front of the living room's two-story fireplace on the other. Plus, a floor-to-ceiling glass wall in the master bedroom overlooks the living room below, and lends any interested voyeur an eagle eye's view to the grooving action below.

For these custom details, the homeowner wanted nothing but the best and brightest builders. An intense vetting process brought them to Pilgrim Building Company (for more on Pilgrim, see "Skill Seekers," on page 91), and project manager, Curtis Eppley, who was on site every day. "The difference about working with Pilgrim is when you walk into the site his guys are all listening to NPR," Dangel recalls one Pilgrim client telling him.

A good example of the team's skills is evident in the hanging installation of 29 clear, cast glass LED pendant light bulbs by Bocci that dangle above the living room sofa. To get the suspended installation just right, Dangel and Glass had to first generate a computer model to determine the height and spacing of each bulb. Then Eppley and his team found a bunch of tennis balls and strung them up to test the coordinates.

"A house is not always black and white. It's more of a one off; it's extremely unique. The homeowner's work finds success in creating something that can be recreated over and over again. But a house is not an equation," Dangel says. "You don't know what you'll find as you go along. There's always a sense of discovery that happens." ■

THIS PAGE The entrance parallels a bamboo-lined reflecting pool, while the master bath has views of the surrounding woods.

OPPOSITE PAGE The second story roof terrace takes a traditional interior space outside.

