

A TALE OF TWO STORIES

FORMER BUNGALOW OWNERS EMBRACE A RESCUED MID-CENTURY GEM IN GLENBROOK VALLEY

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Photography by Jack Thompson*

This is the tale of a house built in the Space Age hamlet of Glenbrook Valley, a remarkably intact mid-century modern neighborhood just southeast of downtown Houston, which was designated as a historic district back in 2010.

For this home, built in 1963, some 50-plus years of wear and an extended period of neglect left the house in such a state that the City of Houston deemed it a public hazard.

A dedicated buyer – who purchased the derelict home in 2011, and with help from many Glenbrook Valley residents – saved the home from the wrecking ball and proceeded to invest a great deal of time, energy and funds to revive the house that had been dubbed a lost cause by the city.

After a full-scale rehab, the massively renovated two-story home was sold to the current owners, Matt Fugate and Rob Browning in 2015.

Fugate and Browning's previous home was a charming 2,200-square-foot 1920s bungalow in the Lawndale/Eastwood area, which they had lovingly restored and decorated over 15 years.

As soon as they purchased the spacious 1960s home in Glenbrook Valley, they realized their stellar collection of bungalow-scaled/period furnishings might not easily translate to their new 5,800-square-foot mid-century two-story, so they reached out to professionals Ben Johnston and Kathy Berardo of Avondale Design Studio. ▶





Colors in the artwork inspired the color palette for the entire first floor. The L'Instant Tattinger poster (featuring Grace Kelly's image behind the champagne flute) is original, stone lithograph, first issued in the 1980s by Tattinger.



This Glenbrook Valley abode is an unusual find among Houston's dominant one-story ranch style mid-century homes. The house sits atop a large lot, sloping down toward Sims Bayou.

Modernizing Mid Century

"They fell in love with the house, and the house kind of seduced them into a new sense of style that wasn't necessarily what they'd been collecting," says Johnston. "We looked for wonderful opportunities to incorporate some of their existing pieces and then add to their collection, mixing it up with more mid-century-inspired pieces."

Johnston explains that while the design goal was to evoke mid-century style, the designers and the homeowners deliberately chose to not go for a hard-lined look, but to create a livable, modern-day interpretation of the era – even incorporating some of the owners' antiques for a classical aesthetic touch.

"We told Ben and Kathy that we do like nice things," says Fugate. "We also emphasized that we live here with our dog and cat, and we like to have friends and family over, so it was important that our home be truly livable."

For the walls of the downstairs living areas, the design team chose a silver/gray grass cloth by Kravet, which offers great texture and suits the long-past era, as well as provides an elegant backdrop

for the couple's collection of early 20th century stone lithographs.

The walls of the two-story entry space had been covered in modern 3-D wall panels, which had been painted a rich blue by the previous owners, but the Avondale Design team opted to simplify the elegant wave pattern by painting it a pure white. The color choice showcases the original iron staircase, now solid black with wooden treads coated in ebony stain, rather than the wildly colored carpeted versions of the past.

Designers Johnston and Berardo took inspiration for the decor from the rich saturation of color in the lithographs to work out the color palette for the entire first floor.

Arrays of soft grays and blues lend a serene setting for the lower-level living space, with geometric patterns harmonizing in those same color tones – offering a nod to mod.

The beauty of the mid-century modern aesthetic is the proliferation of clean lines and simple shapes, which inspired the architecture, furniture, fabrics, lighting and appliances of the era.

Such explains why MCM furniture and accessories are so popular today, and more importantly why still so many original pieces are in existence. The same goes for why so many pieces are being repro-



duced in a wide variety of price points. Those clean lines work so beautifully together, because they don't compete and over-clutter, but share space in complementary fashion.

"When your architecture is this powerful, you tend to want to honor it," says Johnston.

"These guys had fallen in love with the neighborhood and wanted to develop their decor to be faithful and natural to the house," he adds.

Designers Kathy Berardo and Ben Johnston painted the formerly vibrant blue wave-patterned wall tiles a bright white. The stairwell was painted black and the wooden steps were stained a dark ebony.



Formal, yet fun, the oval dining table by Julian Chichester features a hammered metal base, rosewood-stained wooden top, and is paired with handsome chairs from High Fashion Home.

The design team worked to utilize as much of the couple's previous items; however, many of the major furniture pieces in the front living and dining rooms were purchased for this home, while others came with the house.

Overlooking the backyard and Sims Bayou, the cocktail lounge is anchored by an L-shaped sofa – one of the pieces included in the sale of the house. It had been in the front living room, but the design team quickly sized it up and realized it would fit perfectly in the nook designated for the cocktail lounge.

Fugate and Browning had owned the square cocktail ottoman, a

surviving piece from their former bungalow, which the Avondale team had reupholstered with a texturized slate blue vinyl for an MCM touch.

Nearby, a wall unit flanks both the lounge area and the family room. This slim-line modular piece had belonged to previous owner since his teen years. It is a true MCM gem that the sellers offered up with the house. The Avondale team had it refinished in a darker tone, and it now functions beautifully as a bar cabinet.

All of the home's bedrooms are on the second floor, except the master suite. A guest room, a bedroom reserved for the owners' 8-





year-old niece, movie theater, home gym and living room are upstairs.

Toward the back of the home, a billiard room connects to a small wet bar, media/home theater room, and workout space.

Taking advantage of the window overlooking the backyard and bayou, a large table – the previous owner’s dining table – serves as a home office space for both Fugate and Browning.

“We call this room our tree house,” says Fugate, who is a professor of psychology at a local university; Browning is an attorney with a downtown law firm.

Reflecting on the design journey, Browning recalls the challenges of transitioning from their bungalow to the new space.

He says the Avondale team helped greatly with finding the new pieces we needed to pull together the new look.

“We had to find a way to mix in the stuff that really meant a lot to us,” Browning says. “It was really important to find a nice synergy between all of that, because I had a hard time letting go.”

“The designer’s job is to help clients buy wisely with the big picture in mind,” says Johnston. “It can often take homeowners years and years, maybe 15 years, to finish their own home, but a designer can facilitate completing that picture sooner.”

“Instead of having rooms that you don’t use for years, you get to start using your house the way you want to use it sooner,” adds Berardo.



The kitchen, family room and cocktail lounge are located at the back of the house. The designers, Johnston and Berardo, selected new paint colors and accessories for the kitchen, and moved the L-shaped sofa to the cocktail nook. The family room features the original fireplace year-round, used year-round by the homeowners.





The master bedroom features exquisite geometric patterns selected for bed linens, pillows, drapes and wallpaper.

GLENBROOK VALLEY HOME TOUR

Oct. 1-2, noon to 4 p.m.

This year marks the 60th anniversary of the last Parade of Homes, staged by the Houston Builders Association in the 1950s. In commemoration, Glenbrook Valley is hosting its first official neighborhood home tour next month. Two of the six homes featured in this year's home tour were on the 1956 Parade of Homes (the two homes on Cayton Street).

Information and pre-sale tickets available from a link on the neighborhood homepage, www.glenbrookvalley.org

Tickets will also be sold at select homes on the days of the tour. Tickets are \$30/person and include six homes, plus admission to the Airport Museum at Hobby Airport. Proceeds will help fund new signage/markers for the historic neighborhood.

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