



Two Lives, One House

story AMY E. LEMEN photography PAUL BARDAGJY

Sometimes a house is more than simply a place to live. It goes beyond bricks and mortar and design and becomes a structure that has the ability to transform. Sure, it's also a beautiful setting in which to hang one's hat, but it's also reflective of its owners—often in ways quite unimagined at the outset. For the more than four years it took from conceptual design to finding a builder to construction to final walk-through, Mark and Jerry Clements underwent a transformation themselves. Both were high-powered and well-respected trial lawyers and corporate litigators from the Dallas area, but when Jerry transferred from Dallas to Austin with Locke Liddell & Sapp as managing partner, they looked forward to building their dream house in Austin. "When we found this property, we knew we wanted to build something that looked like the Hill Country, not Dallas in the middle of the Hill Country," says Jerry Clements.

Everything changed for Mark Clements, too. He calls building the house an artistic, creative process, with a lot of "blood, sweat, and tears" that made him realize there's more to life than watching people yell at each other. So he decided to leave behind his highly successful 35-year career as a trial lawyer soon after they moved in. "The whole process was artistic—creative, painful, another world," he says. "Life's not about listening to how someone was cheated out of millions in a deal, or creating theater. I'd come here and know there's more to life."

Creating a Vision: The homesite, located in Spicewood, is the Hill Country in all its majestic glory. One look, and you instantly understand why the Austin area is so special. Rolling hills, the colors of nature, a glimpse of the Pedernales River, and quiet—absolute, heavenly quiet. A site like this demanded a unique design, one that not only reflected the area's natural beauty but also enhanced it. Upon a recommendation from a colleague, the couple contacted architect Hobson Crow, who had his own architectural practice at the time (he has since merged with Barnes Gromatzky Kosarek) and who served as design architect, creating the home's initial concept drawings.



"We liked Frank Lloyd Wright and also wanted a feeling of Zen, but didn't know how to start," says Jerry Clements. "Hobson came up with the concept, the materials, and the footprint of the house on the lot. You can't see the houses around us—that's his work." The Clementses knew they wanted an indoor/outdoor house. After all, the house was a gift to each other. Married for 11 years, each had been married before, and they had four grown children. This house was for entertaining, appreciating beauty as avid modern art collectors, and, most importantly, for relaxing. "The business we're in as trial lawyers, we're fighting fights and other people's battles," says Mark Clements. "You have to suppress a lot. When we're here, it's hard to go back to the fights."

A Builder with an Artist's Eye: After the initial drawings were complete, it was clear that the house wasn't going to be an easy one to build. With almost no right angles and with the choice of steel I-beams for the frame, it would be a tricky project. After interviewing several builders, the Clementses chose Garland Turner, owner of WoodEye Construction and Design, as their general contractor. Turner, who has a master's degree in sculpture from Alfred University, a noted art school in western New York, has been a custom builder for more than 12 years. His art background and attention to quality and detail impressed the Clementses and spoke to their own orientation. "This isn't a typical wood-framed house, and that scared a lot of builders away," says Mark Clements. "Garland's a sculptor, he knows about steel, he has an artistic sense of design, and he understands the construction side of things. We really meshed well with him because of that."

Once on board, Turner hired Arthur Lee, AIA, as the project architect to get Crow's initial drawings ready to build. Lee,

now an architect at Gensler in Houston, says the most challenging part of the project was translating the idea from the two-dimensional drawings to the reality of materials and then to an actual structure. "It's hard for homeowners to understand that sometimes, especially if they're not visual," he says. "It helps to have a flexible client when building a custom-designed house, and the Clementses were very trusting with the design."

The Big Picture Comes Together: As career lawyers and linear thinkers, both Mark and Jerry Clements readily agree that it was difficult to see things from a big-picture perspective when it came to what the house was actually going to look like. "I'd been counting time by the quarter hour for 35 years as a trial lawyer, and you compare my right sphere and everyone else with their left sphere, and it's definitely a different part of the brain," says Mark Clements.

When the construction finally got under way, the Clementses were still living in their Dallas house, Jerry was working in Austin, and Mark was commuting back and forth to Dallas. But they would come to Austin on the weekends to check on the progress. It was one of those weekends, in July 2005, when Jerry Clements says they finally understood. "We'd look at the 2-D plans on paper, and it was just Greek to us," she says. "But we came up here that weekend, a year before the house was done, and sat in the fire-pit area, and that's when it dawned on us. We knew it would be worth the wait."

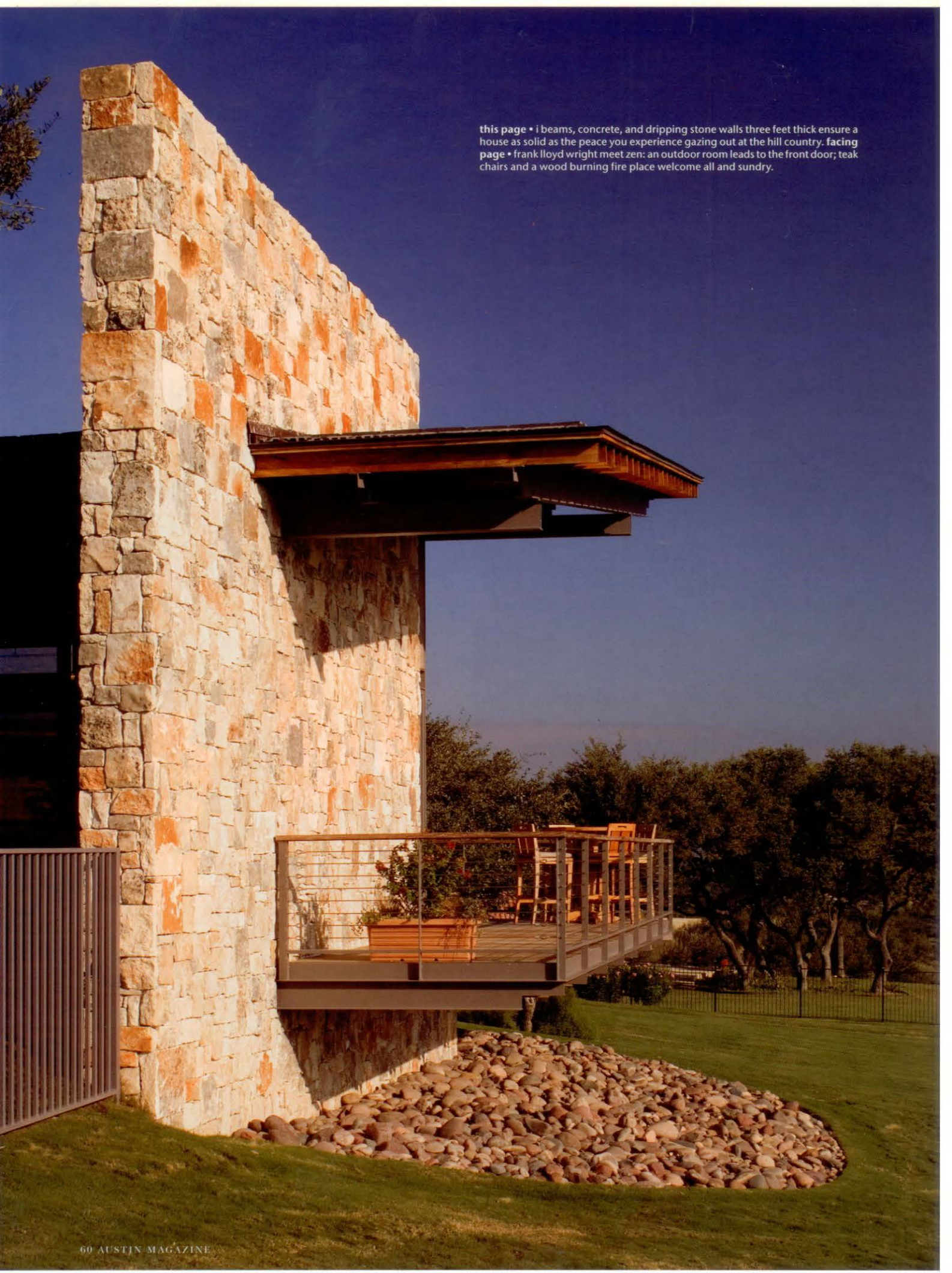
A Complicated Vision Becomes Reality: Much of the long construction process had to do with the materials used: steel I-beams for framing the house, then concrete, then stunning Dripping Springs stone on the outside. The walls of the oblong house are about three and a half feet thick; to say



previous spread • the furniture is eclectic; rather than chrome, steel, black, and white, earth tones and smooth organic lines dominate. facing page • vibrant colors are borrowed from pieces of art created by well-known modern artists from UT art school circa 1940-1960. this page • the confluence of indoor/outdoor spaces, art work, and soothing colors envelope the owners in comfort.



this page • natural light pervades the kitchen; mellow wood tempers marble, chrome and steel. **facing page** • not overly modern yet unconventional, balance is essential to tranquil dreams.



this page • i beams, concrete, and dripping stone walls three feet thick ensure a house as solid as the peace you experience gazing out at the hill country. **facing page** • frank lloyd wright meet zen: an outdoor room leads to the front door; teak chairs and a wood burning fire place welcome all and sundry.



it's solid is an understatement. Inside, there's a cantilevered staircase and three fireplaces. Turner explains that using steel was the only way to build a house like this without adding the tremendous amount of mass it would take to get a wood beam to do the same thing. "There was a vision there; it was very complicated, and there were a lot of decisions that had to be made," says Turner. "When Mark and Jerry saw the house coming together, they realized we cared about giving them the best house we could."

The end result is a main house with one bedroom and one and a half baths, and a guesthouse, for total interior space of about 4,400 square feet. The guesthouse has two bedrooms, a large study with comfortable leather club chairs for lounging and watching football games, and two bathrooms; it's a smaller, cozier version of the main house that takes care to build upon the Hill Country theme with concrete and natural wood floors, pecan cabinets, and earthy hues. "We wanted something that wasn't connected to the house for our guests' privacy and ours," explains Jerry Clements. "We have a lot of guests who want to move in!"

Rooms With a View: It's the exterior of the house that is perhaps most stunning. In an outdoor room that leads to the front door, teak chairs with all-weather cushions and a wood-burning fireplace provide a welcome place to sit and perhaps enjoy an al fresco supper. A courtyard connects the main house and the guesthouse, and its centerpiece is a fire-pit seating and conversation area, also furnished with comfortable chairs.

Zen-like rock pathways lead to the fire pit, which overlooks stunning Hill Country scenery and is adjacent to a kinetic sculpture by John Tyler, bought on a trip to California's Big Sur, that gently moves with the prevailing winds. Inside the main house, huge walls are perfect canvases for the Clement-

ses' growing Texas mid-century modern art collection. Many of the pieces are by well-known modern art masters from the University of Texas art school in the 1940s and 1950s, among them Ralph White, William Lester, and Michael Frary. There are also several pieces by Dallas artist Bruce Tinch, who is currently working on a very large custom piece that will be the heart of the living room.

Peace with Nature: Bibiana B. Dykema, AIA, president of Dykema Architects in Corpus Christi and a licensed interior designer, was brought in to design the interiors for both the main house and the guesthouse. She says the focus was on creating a peaceful place with natural earth tones that didn't detract from the view. "There's little clutter, and it's very soothing," she says. "The furniture has clean lines, it's not overly modern and it's not traditional, and it doesn't overwhelm the architecture. We also focused on natural woods and stone, and handmade iron pieces and warm colors that reflected the view."

The furniture, purchased specifically for the house, is an eclectic, warm mix that contributes to the Clementses' desire for a peaceful oasis to showcase their art. It's not chrome and steel or black and white; rather, it's warm earth tones, comfortable seating, vibrant colors from stunning artwork—a setting that envelops its owners in comfort. Since the couple moved into the house in September 2005, Mark's life has revolved around taking care of family businesses, collecting and dealing art, and enjoying life and family. "The house came first and then the art," he says. "This house is a gigantic metaphor. Garland saw it as art, too, and he was very stubborn about quality and not cutting corners. He said we'd forget all about the questions and 23 months of construction after moving in, and he was right. I come here, and everything changes." / AL