





The Dream from the Sidewalk

A tale of love, urban density and the nuances of a neighborhood

BY SANDRA COOK

PHOTOS BY YOONCHUL YOU, STUDIOMET ARCHITECTS

As renters, it's often easier to live inside the city, close to professional pursuits and cultural pastimes. As a result, renters often fall in love with their neighborhood, only to have to leave it behind when they are ready to buy a home.

Gavin and Laura Jones met while they were both renting in Midtown. It's difficult to tell which came first, their love for each other or their love of their historic neighborhood. The couple frequently explored the oak-lined blocks on the western edge of Midtown as they walked their Yorkshire Terrier along the shaded streetscape. The magnificent oaks date back to the early 20th-century, when the area was first developed as one of Houston's first residential neighborhoods.

While the area is home to several large, mid-rise apartment properties built in recent decades, the serene ambiance beneath the tree branches and the humble scale of the old city blocks provides an instant connection to the century past.

As Gavin and Laura took their neighborhood walks, they often admired a vacant lot next to a single family home and dreamed of one day building a house on the lot.

"We love this neighborhood," says Laura. "When we saw it was for sale we jumped on it right away. I don't think anyone else had a chance to bid on it." ►

Laura and Gavin Jones selected StudioMET architects to design their home in historic Midtown. The couple, who met while living in apartments in the area, fell in love with the oak-lined streetscape. Design discussions among the homeowners and architects resulted in the eye-catching variety of colors and textures on the front exterior, including Hardie panels—in both white and purple—and corrugated metal.

MODERN SENSIBILITY

Gavin and Laura developed a mutual passion for modern architecture over the years. Gavin, who grew up in Australia, became fascinated with modern design from an early age. Together, Gavin and Laura frequently attended home tours, such as the AIA Houston Home Tour. They studied the spaces that appealed to them and noted architects' work that spoke to their sensibilities.

After they had procured the parcel of land they had pondered for years, they began their search for an architecture firm to design their first house.

"We looked at the AIA award winners from the past 10 years, looked at their style and interviewed several firms," says Gavin.

"We wanted to be sure we liked the architects' personality, because we knew we would be spending a lot of time with them," says Laura.

The couple selected Studio MET Architects, an award-winning design/build firm. "We tell clients it's about the personal connection," says Shawn Gottschalk, AIA. "It's a very personal process to design a home for someone. That's very exciting to us. It's very different from a commercial job that doesn't have that personal connection."

The firm oversaw both the design and the build-out. "We want to see our profession get back to the idea of the 'Master Builder,'" says Gottschalk.

Studio Met Architects met with Gavin and Laura about 12 times over three months to discuss and develop the design. Like many home design projects, the conversation started with a scrapbook of desired elements that were must haves. Laura and Gavin sought a modern home with a pleasing simplicity and built with durable, low-maintenance materials.

"We wanted a house that was filled with light," says Laura.

"And we wanted a nice interaction with the garden space as well as a strong presence from the street," says Gavin.

"Australia is a very young country, without a lot of architectural history, so Modern architecture has been widely embraced there for many, many years," says Gavin. "The design of our house was not intended to shock or make big statement, but Modern architecture is still a bit unusual here, especially in the southern United States."

URBAN SCENE

"The context is unique with almost all of the surrounding properties being multi-story apartment complexes," says Stephen Andrews. Those properties proved to be a driving force behind the entire design, specifically the layout, form and window placement.

"It is important to have mixed density within the urban context and a single family residence adds to the overall composition of the urban fabric — it creates vitality and visual interest," says Shawn Gottschalk. "It was very important for the home to respond to the streetscape and the pedestrian. We wanted to create a home that contributed to the overall idea of the community."

StudioMET steered the design and build-out of the home, with the pool always a part of the overall vision. After their home was completed, Laura and Gavin employed Downunda Aquatic Environments to design and construct the pool to complement the look of the house.









This was essential given that Laura and Gavin are active participants in that street scene and not just for doggie outings. “We are big walkers. We love to walk to the shops and restaurants in this area.”

When asked about the purple accent on the front exterior, Gavin laughs, saying “the purple is about faith in my wife and faith in my builder.”

As the idea to include a colorful contrast on the front of the home developed, Laura pushed for purple. “Gavin had suggested red, but I thought it was too manly,” says Laura. “I explained that our home should look like a couple’s house.”

To achieve the deeply-hued purple, the firm encouraged the Joneses to use painted Hardie panels, set off with metal trim.

“We are always experimenting and developing unique details that utilize everyday, cost-effective materials in a creative way,” says Gottschalk. “In doing this we are able to transform the material into something that is fresh and new. For this project we utilized a fiber cement board and a custom galvanized reveal to create different compositions and texture.”

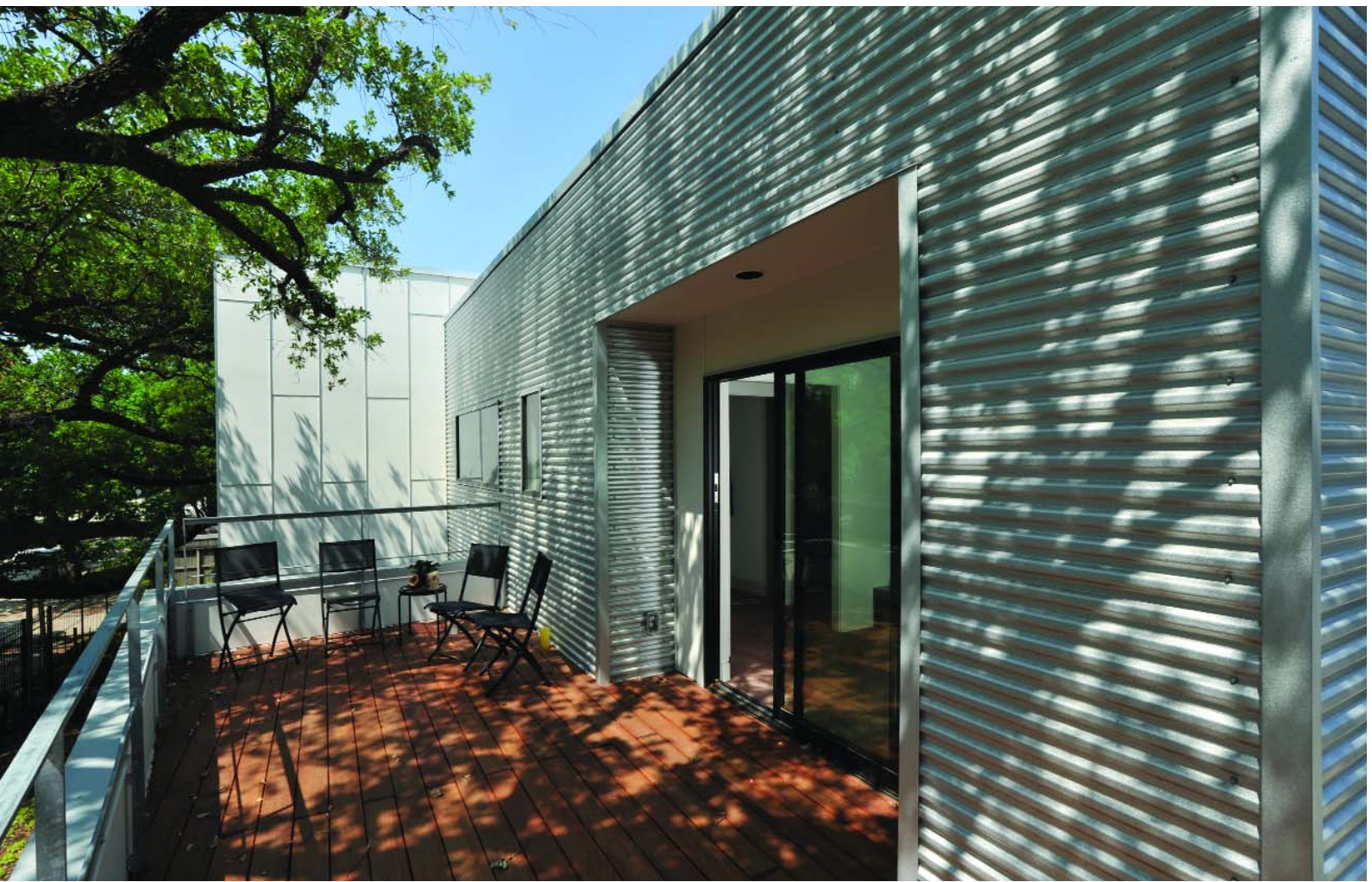
Another reason the front of the home draws the eye is the unusual lot is not quite a rectangular. The property features one long side that kicks out at an angle, making the front of the lot wider than the back, so the sight lines provide the effect of a perspective drawing. This allowed for the deck on top of garage, which connects to the guest suite, to be especially generous, stretching wide to address the oak-lined street below.

“Stephen did a great job on the deck, integrating with the trees,” says Gavin of Andrews’ design.

“It feels like a tree house up there,” says Gottschalk.

The effect also imparts a welcoming openness to the front entry.

The galley kitchen allows guests to perch at the bar and observe their hosts in action. The glass-tiled backsplash and Silestone countertops help highlight the functional beauty of the space. Appliances include a Sharp sliding drawer microwave, two wood-paneled Thermador dishwashers and a 36-inch Professional Series Thermador range. Light fixtures were sourced from Lighting Unlimited.



ABOVE: The deck, finished with Ipe wood from Brazil, was placed atop the garage and offers a bird's eye view of the street below.

RIGHT: The pleasing pool view can be enjoyed from the entire first floor and much of the second. In the living area, the pair of white leather custom sofas from Cantoni feature stitching that matches the wall color, Sherwin Williams Gray Flannel. The glass-and-steel LC10 coffee table is Le Corbusier's 1928 design. The painting is a by a Brazilian artist.

PRODUCTIVE PARTNERSHIP

"We collaborate very closely with our clients as well as within the office," says Andrews. "We are unique in that we are a small boutique firm, but we have three licensed architects that work closely together on each project. Most small firms have one or maybe two architects, and even large firms might only have one architect assigned to each project as the project manager with other support staff around him/her."

"We spend a lot of time on the schematic design listening to our clients, establishing what their priorities are, and what they value," says Gottschalk. "Our work is not about a specific style. We strongly believe in an architecture of authenticity. Simply said, we approach each project with a unique perspective that is directed by the program, budget, and site. Our work is about our clients and it reflects who they are and how they want to live."

Gavin reports that the initial design plan was very close to the finished project and very little changed during the construction phase. He also pleased that Studio MET ran the build-out.

"There was a comfort level knowing that same people were responsible for building our house," says Gavin. "We feel very blessed to be able to go through this process – every day we are thankful. And we felt comfortable here as soon as we moved in, because we were very familiar with the spaces after both design and construction phases."

The success of the daylighting is a delight for Laura. "I love that no lamps need to be on during day. Laura, who did the landscaping for their home also relishes their personal green space. "It's our first backyard," she smiles.

"Residential design is a very intimate process," says Gottschalk. "It is very important to find the right firm to collaborate with. At the end of the day, this is what contributes to the overall success of a project. There has to be a good dynamic among everyone. For us, our work is not just about another business transaction. We are very passionate about what we do and take the time to get to know our clients and the way they live their lives, or the way they want to live their lives. To be honest, we typically become very good friends with our clients and this often leads to repeat projects with them." ▶





RESOURCES

ARCHITECTURE:
Shawn Gottschalk,
StudioMet Architects,
713.255.0007

WINDOWS:
RAM Industries
281.495.9056

SLIDING DOORS:
Fleetwood
www.fleetwoodusa.net

TILE: LANOVA TILE
713.796.9050

CUSTOM MILLWORK:
KNI Enterprises
Ricardo Dillion
281.684.2671

POOL CONTRACTOR:
Downunda Aquatic Environments
281.236.4344

LIGHTING:
Lighting Unlimited
713.626.4025

METAL SIDING: MBCI
281.445.8555

FIBER CEMENT SIDING:
James Hardie
www.jameshardie.com

LEFT: In the guest bath, custom walnut cabinets are topped with Silestone. A mix of glass tiles, a vessel sink with Hans Grohe faucet and a pair of sconces from Lighting Unlimited complete the soothing look.

RIGHT: While the house was designed to embrace its neighborhood, the Joneses still enjoy ample privacy. The subtle presence of the deck above the garage lends a tree house feel for peaceful observation of the street scene.



