



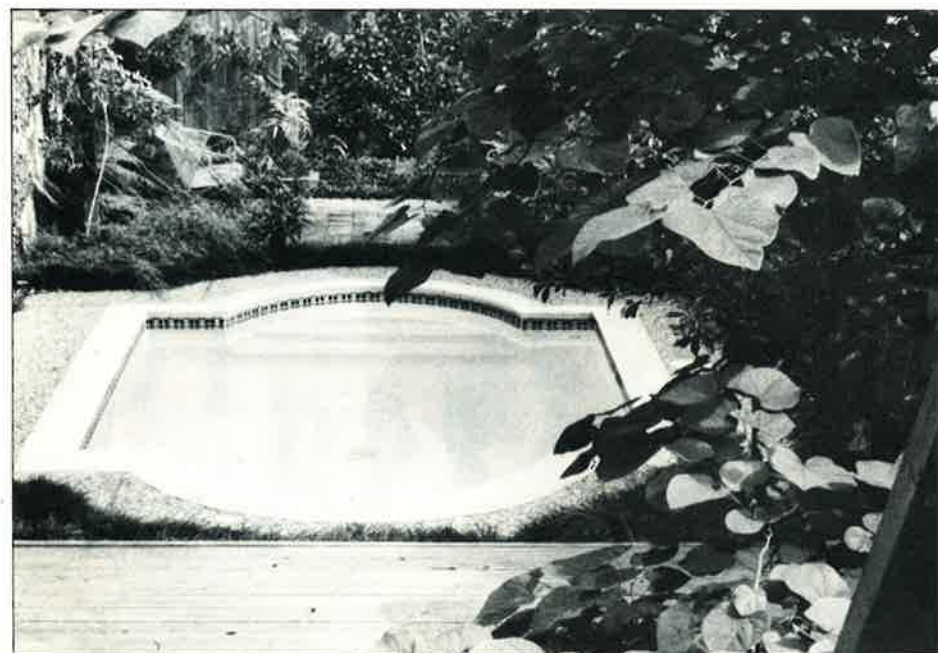
Outside looking in

Houstonians are remodeling right into the front yard.

The E. E. Johnstones started modestly with this.



And then they parlayed that beginning into an exciting two story home with a private front yard.



And they added a small swimming pool running along one side of the house. From a small beginning, they've got a great finish.

by
Wendy Haskell Meyer

Good fences may still make good neighbors, as Robert Frost pointed out some 60 years ago, but I suspect that if by some magic the privacy-cherishing poet were plunked down in one of Houston's older neighborhoods today — with nary a cow or apple orchard in sight—he might do as many a Houstonian has done recently: build himself an enclosed front yard, separating himself not only from his neighbors on each side but from every passerby.

It's an old idea in Europe but relatively new here, this move away from the conventional American picture window framing an unused front lawn and street traffic. Why not create a new living area in all that wasted space, a private place which is pleasing to the eye, utilitarian to the homeowner and often less trouble and expensive to maintain than the usual grass?

But wait a minute! If you live in Houston, you can't just go out and build a high fence out front next to the sidewalk just like that. There are easements, permits, deed restrictions, subdivision codes and prohibitions to consider first.

Some neighborhoods specifically forbid any construction of fences or walls; some will allow them only along side property lines or at a minimum distance back from the street.

Not that determined souls haven't found ways of getting around such restrictions, the most common one being to plant a hedge which within a year or two grows in height and density to be as effective a screen as any fence.

First, the rules

It is up to the individual homeowner
Houston Home & Garden

owner, not the city, to determine whether a fence complies with local deed restrictions and to be certain it is built on his or her own, not city, property. If you've built your fence on city (or a neighbor's) property, the city inspector can make you move it.

If the fence is to be over 6 feet in height, the homeowner (or building contractor) must comply with the following procedures: first, pick up an application at the tax office on the first floor of City Hall. An application will not be issued if taxes on the property are in arrears. The applicant will then be routed to City Hall Annex to the water department and sanitary sewer counters for initialing of the form (again, this is conditional on all bills being paid).

Next stop is Room 1200 in the City Hall Annex where the application must be presented along with a plot plan and the design showing how the fence is to be constructed. Building inspector E. Z. Monroe advises that boards must be able to withstand 20 pounds wind pressure—he says posts 8 feet apart or closer, sunk 3 feet into the ground, with two 2"x4" nail bars will ordinarily do. If the plan is approved, a permit will be issued at a cost of \$5 for the first 100 feet and \$1.50 for each additional 100 feet.

Those are the regulations for fences over 6, but no more than 8 feet. Houstonians usually stick to this height although at least one homeowner chose a 12 foot high brick wall which completely masks the exciting house he has remodeled behind it.

Aesthetics and security seem to be equal motivations for the greater height. High fences often feature handsome paneled doors (instead of



This is what Tom Oxford started with.



This is how the outside looks now. Oxford added a fence for greater privacy.



And just look inside. A brick patio and lots of plants give him a private place to entertain, garden, and live in.