

remodeling

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Little Stacy Park

No remodel is ever easy, but this one presented distinctive challenges. Starting with an untraceable type of block, tricky building codes, and a dilapidated structure, the builders and architects say they “fought this old house all the way to the end.” But they also say the effort was worth it. “The transformation from the dog it was to what it is now, that’s the most exciting part,” says David Kilpatrick of Tim Cuppett Architects.

The client wanted to switch from three bedrooms and one bathroom to two

bedrooms and two bathrooms. To do this, the entry was moved to one side, eliminating the central hall and creating a circular flow of movement through adjoining rooms. The third bedroom was subdivided into two full bathrooms. The plan also called for a shed in the backyard to be turned into a garage/guesthouse.

To save on cost and keep the home’s “quirkiness,” the client wanted to preserve the original yellow block on the house, which Kilpatrick and builder Jeremy Martin both wanted to tear down.

“We could’ve done the same work better, faster, and with the same return, but the client wanted the block,” Martin says.

Keeping it turned into a much more difficult project than expected.

“I tried to find that block,” Martin contends, “but I couldn’t find a match anywhere in Austin or central Texas.”

“We had no idea where it was from,” Kilpatrick says. This unusual block forced them to innovate. Instead of buying more, they had to cover areas with similar paint or harvest block from the site. For all they

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knew, it could crumble at any time.

"Moving a window 12 inches was out of the question," Kilpatrick says.

Even so, the block ended up benefiting the project. For instance, it inspired the simple metal roof. "The house was screaming loud with pattern from the block," Kilpatrick says. "The metal roof was a way for us to make a new material palette quiet and make the block stand on its own. We wanted a simple texture, not something that would compete with the block."

Additionally, the hanging mirrors in the bathroom resulted from an inability to safely move the block. Kilpatrick says there wasn't enough block to patch the window sill, so they had to move the cabinet forward.

In the living room, the ceiling was raised, which drastically expanded the volume of the house and let in much more sunlight. The glass front door (a wood design was originally planned but was scrapped due to the manufacturer's fears of warping) modernized the home's look and let sunlight flow in.

"From a transformation standpoint, the high windows and vaulted ceilings still blow me away," Martin says.

The judges raved. "They took something pretty old and tired and made it fresh, but in its freshness, they didn't strip the charm out," one said. "The kitchen has color in it, but it doesn't feel dark for how much dark cabinetry there is."

Moving to the garage/guesthouse, there were even more challenges than the unusual block. The garage with the second floor was squeezed into a tight footprint covered by a canopy of twisted oaks. Meticulous vertical dimensions were taken in order to avoid tree limbs.

Kilpatrick says building around the trees was the biggest hurdle, since Austin building codes limit the amount of development that can take place in the "drip zone" of the tree—the area in which water shed by the tree drips to the ground above its root system.

Building the garage and routing power, gas, and water lines was "a circus act," Kilpatrick says. "The slab of the garage is threaded into the root system. We were trying to get the building to not hurt the trees and vice versa."

Inside, the tile, windows, and detailing are consistent with the style of the main house. The big difference is the green paint in the kitchenette.—*Sean Wallisch*



Project Details

CATEGORY

Whole-House Remodel
over \$500,000

ARCHITECT

Tim Cuppett, Dave
Kilpatrick, Robert
Featherston, and Adriana
Chetty, Tim Cuppett
Architects, Austin, Texas

BUILDER

Jeremy Martin
RisherMartin Fine Homes,
Austin, Texas

