

By **GENE MENEZ**

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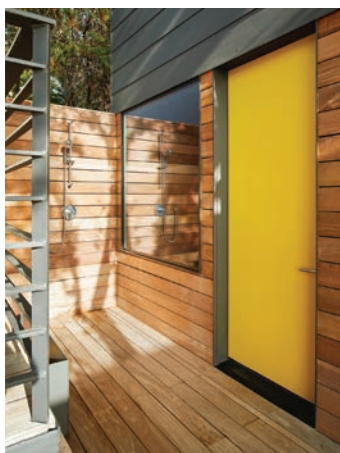


California Dreamin'

A HOME HIGH IN THE HILLS OF
WESTLAKE BRINGS A WEST COAST
VIBE TO CENTRAL TEXAS



The front of the house (far right) slopes down to the street; the renovated kitchen (opposite) now has an unobstructed view to the west; cabinetry and a dining table (above) are made from walnut; a yellow door to the Manbana (near right) leads from the outdoor shower to an indoor bathroom.



Every morning

Chris and Krisinda Smith wake up, descend the stairs of the Westlake home that they share with their two boys, walk onto the deck and enter paradise.

What exactly is paradise? A multilevel deck with beautiful views of the Hill Country that extend for miles. A resort-worthy pool and hot tub. A 1,200-square-foot studio and home office that Chris has lovingly dubbed the Manbana. And, of course, a 3,600-square-foot modern home that was extensively renovated to make all of this possible.

High in the hills and with views all around, the property brings a California vibe to Central Texas. “It feels like you’re in Los Angeles and the Santa Monica Mountains,” Chris says.

And that’s exactly what the couple wanted—the result of two native Texans wanting to bring the west coast vibe that they grew to love back to their home state.

“I’m in absolute paradise here,” Chris says. “The house is beyond any dreams and expectations of what we wanted. Every day that I wake up and walk onto the deck I could not be any happier.”

In 2015, Chris and Krisinda, who are from San Antonio and Dallas, respectively, packed up their home in Santa Monica, Calif., and moved to Austin for better “tacos, barbecue and parking,” Chris says. Upon searching for a new place to live, Krisinda came across a contemporary house in Westlake.



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The fireplace in the lower living room (left) has the same gray tile as the backsplash in the kitchen; the master bedroom (opposite bottom) has views of the sunset; the interior of the Manbana (right) has a masculine feel; guests enter the home via a staircase (below) on the side of the house; at dusk, the deck (bottom) remains a great place to relax.



Designed by famed Austin architect Alan Taniguchi and built in 1996, the home had tons of natural light, vaulted ceilings, modern lines and the stunning views that the Smiths, coming from picturesque Santa Monica, desired.

“The second I walked in the house, I Facetimed Chris and said, ‘I found it,’” Krisinda recalls. “It reminded me of California. I like a lot of natural light. I like a modern house that still feels warm and homey. This is exactly what we wanted.”

The home, however, wasn’t perfect. For one, the house lacked an adequate home office for Chris, a film director who directed and co-produced the 1999 documentary *American Movie*, which won the Grand Jury Prize for Documentary at the Sundance Film Festival. Also, the existing pool was “old and sad-looking,” according to Krisinda, and had structural issues that needed to be fixed.

Finally, even though the property had amazing views, there were huge columns in the house, including one in the kitchen, that blocked the views.

“The original house was built to be modern, but over the years people unmodernized it,” Chris says. “We wanted to modernize it again.”

The Smiths hired Matt Fajkus Architecture, RisherMartin Fine Homes and interior designer Michelle Tumlin to handle the project. That included, among other things, designing and constructing the office studio on the south side of the lot, creating a backwards L-shape with the main house; replacing and relocating the existing pool and adding a hot tub; redoing the deck to create multiple tiers; and removing those interior columns to open up the views.

“The house hadn’t been maintained over the years,” Fajkus recalls. “Most of the decisions had muddled up the original concept. But it was clear there were good bones, and there was plenty of potential.”

Today, the home has realized that potential—and much more. The reconfigured kitchen is a chef’s dream, featuring an abundance of natural light, walnut cabinetry, new appliances, a dark gray tile backsplash and, of course, no column. Stop by the home on a regular weeknight, and you’re likely to find the Smiths hanging out here.

“Somehow we’re always in the kitchen,” Krisinda says.

To access the deck, pool and studio, the Smiths pass through the lower living room. (There also is an upper living room “where life happens,” Chris says.) The space features a two-level fireplace with the same gray tile as the kitchen backsplash and a main wall with wallpaper that has been painted, giving the wall a bit of subtle character.

Sliding doors lead to the overhauled deck, pool and hot tub. Made entirely of ipe wood, the deck has an upper level with a rectangular fire table from Restoration Hardware and a lower level with an outdoor dining table and chairs and two hanging chairs.

“We like to spend as much time as possible outside,” Krisinda says. “Even in winter, as cold as it gets, people will still come and hang out at our fireplace.”

She adds, “It’s just a nice place to chill out with your friends and have a glass of wine.”

At the far end of the deck sits the studio office. Chris has nicknamed it the Manbana because it is part man cave and part pool cabana. While the ipe wood exterior of the Manbana flows with the rest of the outdoor space, the interior has the feel of a New York City loft, with an open floor plan, concrete floors and exposed ceiling.

In addition to having some postproduction equipment to assist Chris with work, the Manbana also has several man cave features: a PlayStation that gets much use by Chris and the boys, massage chair, home gym and even a driving simulator with a 65-inch screen that wouldn’t be out of place at your local Dave & Buster’s.

“My happy place is working in the office studio, spending time outside or hanging out in the hot tub or in the pool making calls—blending the line between getting work done and hanging out on the deck or in the studio,” Chris says. “That, to me, is the dream I wanted to have when we came to Austin, and that’s what we did.”

Indeed, the Smiths have created their Hollywood ending in Austin.

“It feels like our forever family home,” Krisinda says. “We don’t expect to leave here anytime soon.”

