



The dogtrot design of the house, with a breezeway separating each side, allows the homeowner to feel both secluded and connected to the lake.

Life Is a Breezeway

Juggling prime water views and an oft-visited neighbor, an architect reincarnates the dogtrot into a relaxing, contemporary lake house

BY CARLA AVOLIO

Talk to any lake-loving Austinites, and they can tell you about Ski Shores Cafe—a waterside burger joint that’s been an institution for the boat-and-Jet Ski set for 60 years. More observant types might have also noticed the grassy lot neighboring the cafe that, despite its prime waterfront location on Lake Austin, sat undeveloped. On the floodplain, riddled with zoning restrictions—not to mention being

smack-dab next to a noisy venue—it was the sort of property that nobody wanted to touch. Nobody, that is, except Stuart Sampley.

Sampley is an architect who relishes a challenge. “The people in the city planning office always laugh at me, saying, ‘Do you ever have a simple project?’” he jokes. “But for me, the difficult ones are the best.”

And so, in 2012, he was hired to do what none had done before: build beside Ski Shores. The

lot’s neighbor posed the greatest challenge of the project. “Ski Shores is packed all the time—it’d be like living next to Torchy’s,” Sampley says.

Given that the client was a busy doctor who wanted a weekend retreat where he could unwind by the water, Sampley had the conflicting task of creating a house that was simultaneously private and connected to the lake on its doorstep.

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After having an alfresco dinner at the custom table that seats 16 (left), guests can leave the breezeway and enjoy a patio space (above) just steps from Lake Austin.

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Sampley's solution was to go back in time to the dogtrot—a traditional style in which separate buildings are connected by a breezeway, or “dogtrot,” under a single roof. Placing the living room and kitchen in one side and three bedrooms in the other, Sampley designed every door to open into the central breezeway, effectively angling the house inward. “Everything is like a horse blinder with tunnel vision out to the lake,” says Sampley, “so there can be 300 people next door, but you’ll never know.”

Driving the design was the client's desire for a simple, unpretentious dwelling that “feels comfortable for two to 200 people,” Sampley says. The architect responded with a modestly proportioned 1,800-square-foot home that walks the line between intimacy and spaciousness. In an innovative twist, the 16-seat custom dining table was placed in the breezeway, creating the perfect venue for a cool summer lunch when the troops descend. Small parties, on the other hand, might pull up a stool at the kitchen island or lounge on the U-shaped sofa in the living room, which, sunken 30 inches, is deliciously cloistered below the sight line of passing boats.

In keeping with the home's outdoorsy function, Sampley employed a tight palette of durable materials—Lueders Limestone on the walls, concrete on the floors, accents of warm Southern yellow pine—that create a neutral stage for a cast of vivacious furnishings that channel the summery fun of a pool party.

The result is a welcoming weekend house that celebrates the great outdoors over architectural ego. Or, as Sampley puts it: “It's beautiful without screaming, ‘Hey look at me I'm the biggest house on the lake.’”