

Remaking a Classic

A contemporary design grounded in classical architecture makes this Westlake home stand out from the crowd BY CARLA AVOLIO



Approaching the house, tucked into the bottom of a leafy street in Westlake, feels somewhat like finding a glimmering jewel on a forest floor. Visitors drive up a peaceful avenue, passing stately oak trees behind which huddle expansive brick dwellings in tan, beige and brown. Then, as the visitors near a cul-de-sac, they see the house hidden amongst the trees: a neat, white cottage wrapped in board and batten siding and crowned with a pretty, gabled roof in slate gray.

For owner Jody Chapman, this striking home—with its blend of contemporary and classic design—is the culmination of a long-held dream. “I always said to my husband that if we ever built a home, I wanted it to be a modern farmhouse,” says Chapman, who fell in love with the style after happy holidays spent in the Napa Valley. But as the couple set up home in

Los Angeles and then Seattle, that opportunity eluded them. Then, two years ago, in search for sun and good schools for their two young children, they moved to Austin. “We originally thought we’d just move straight in somewhere,” she says. “But we soon realized that to get the look we wanted, we’d have to build.”

It didn’t take them long to find the perfect collaborators. While browsing through the home design website Houzz, Chapman stumbled upon the work of builder Michael Alwan of Redbud Custom Homes. The Chapmans hired Alwan, who immediately knew the right architect for the job. “From the photos they were showing me of these contemporary barns with pitched roofs, I knew Tim Brown would be perfect,” Alwan says. “Tim does the traditional house better than anybody in Austin.”

Brown’s work is a modern take on the Folk Victorian home, which was popular in the late 1800s and early 1900s and was distinguished by a tall, narrow gable and steep roof.

Brown’s work is a modern take on the Folk Victorian home, which was popular in the late 1800s and early 1900s and was distinguished by a tall, narrow gable and steep roof. And while this turn-of-the-century style is part of Texas heritage, particularly in historically German towns such as Fredericksburg, Brown is by no means creating museum pieces. “Victorians used ornate decorations, which can sometimes look like Grandma’s house,” says Brown. “It’s really the basic shapes, proportions and functions of the style that’s intrinsic to our work.” And for the Chapman residence, this meant taking the gables and simple roofline of

Brown designed the exterior of the house on both the front and the rear to feature the gables and steep rooflines of Folk Victorian architecture, but in a cleaned-up way.

Folk Victorian architecture and cleaning it up. “It’s really just a stripped-down version of a classic form,” he says. ▶

Indeed, the dwelling's character—at once welcoming and homey yet incredibly chic—is undeniably a result of this fresh take on tradition: deep porches uncluttered by intricate trimming and traditional siding painted a refreshing white. And it's not simply cosmetic; the new-meets-old philosophy extends to the function of the 2,647-square-foot house too. "It was important for us to maintain the gracious scale particular to Folk Victorian homes while providing the square footage required by a 21st-century family," says Brown. To achieve this, he made rooms do double-duty. The second-floor landing became a playroom complete with navy blue beanbags and nooks for video games and reading. And the butler's pantry was made to work overtime as storage, laundry, wine bar, drop zone for coats and feeding station for the family labrador.

Brown divided the house into three main zones: second floor, main living area and master suite. From the outside, this helped break up the roofline to prevent it from looking, in his words, "like a mountain hanging over your head." Inside, this zoning gave the house another major advantage: energy efficiency. With variable-speed, mini-split air-conditioning systems, each zone can be heated and cooled separately. However, as is customary for Brown's projects, the building doesn't scream green values. "We don't do anything exotic," he says. "The efficiency is intrinsic in the design, not a piece of machinery tacked on at the end."

Brown's design allowed him to fit four bedrooms and three full baths into



the modestly sized house, but he raised more than a few eyebrows in the process. "During the build, I would overhear people saying, 'This house is tiny. It doesn't fit in the neighborhood,'" recalls Brown. Not that it bothered the team. "We're building legacy homes, so we prioritize quality over quantity," says Alwan.

Restraint played an even larger role in the interiors. Instead of hiring a designer to help with finishes, Chapman worked with Alwan with whom she "just clicked" on an aesthetic level. "We both don't like too much color," Alwan says. Sticking to a classic palette, they created a textural backdrop (e.g. a range of ethereal Carrera marble in the kitchen and master bathroom) upon which they added considered splashes of color: a striking harlequin rug in the entry foyer, a stormy blue couch in the living room and rustic barn wood behind the television.

Having lived in the house since September 2013, Chapman says this exercise in restraint feels like anything but. "It's such a welcoming and spacious home," she says. And it's not just the



In lieu of hiring an interior designer, Chapman consulted with the homebuilder on the finishes and decor. She chose a classic palette, exemplified by Carrera marble in the master bathroom (left) and kitchen (above) and white linens in the nursery (above, left). In the well-lit living room, the homeowner decided to place a rustic barn wood backdrop behind the television.

owners who appreciate it. "The biggest compliment is how it has been embraced by the neighborhood," says Alwan. "People stop us on the street saying how much they love its size and classic shape. Hopefully we've helped change, even a small bit, the way Austin thinks about building homes." ■

