



## WARM FRONT

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CLAD IN STONE AND SURROUNDED BY SOARING BAMBOO, THE HOUSE QUIETLY RISES UP FROM THE EDGE OF THE BAYOU, LIKE MIST HOVERING ABOVE THE WATER. Evocative of an old, European country estate but with the clean and contemporary lines its owners called for, the rooms in this 10,000-square-foot Houston home are at once sprawling yet genuinely intimate, a feat deftly achieved by its interior designer.

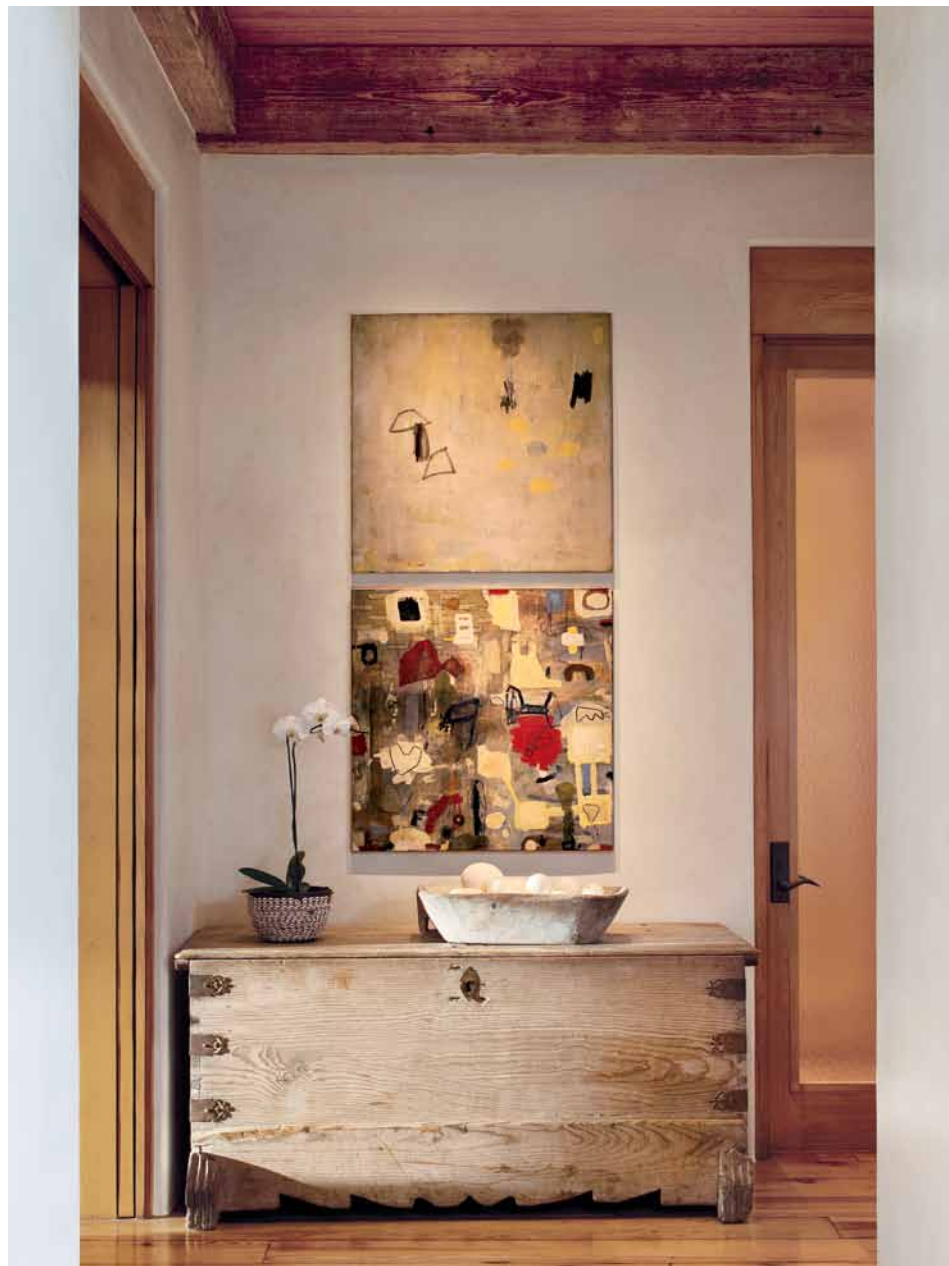
"The scale of this house is unbelievable," says Ginger Barber, ASID, of Ginger Barber Design in Houston. "You almost walk through it with a feeling of awe." Built for a socially active, polo-playing couple and their two children, "It's very large, yet it absolutely needed to function as a home," says the designer. "That was the challenge." Tempering the abundance of hard surfaces found throughout—thick wood beams, Texas Lueders stone and plaster walls—without taking away from the splendor of the home's architecture was also a test. "Tom did such an amazing job with his design and mix of materials," says Barber of architect Tom Wilson. "It was very important to me that we didn't take anything away from that."

Indeed, it's the architecture that initially defines the mood of the home, both inside and out, largely due to the way it harmonizes with the site. Hidden away on a heavily wooded lot at the end of a winding private drive, the L-shaped, two-story house comprises three distinct structures: two main wings connected by a formal entry hall, and a carriage house-like three-car garage, linked by an enclosed second entry. "The homeowners didn't want the house to be visible from the street," explains Wilson, AIA, of Tom Wilson & Associates in Houston. "So we pushed it back onto the lot as far as we could and preserved as much of the existing vegetation as possible in order to shield it even further." But as dramatic as the home's approach is, it's the sleepy marsh that lies behind it—and beneath it—that made this property "the one" for its owners.

<b>INTERIOR DESIGN</b> Ginger Barber, ASID, Ginger Barber Design, Inc.
<b>ARCHITECTURE</b> Tom Wilson, AIA, Tom Wilson & Associates
<b>HOME BUILDER</b> Jerry Chisholm, The Southampton Group
<b>BEDROOMS</b> 5 <b>BATHROOMS</b> 6 <b>SQUARE FEET</b> 10,000



**HOT ROCKS**  
Reclaimed wood beams, salvaged from an old warehouse in Massachusetts, infuse the stone and plaster walls of the living room with warmth. The couch, upholstered in linen, was found at George Cameron Nash; the antique table in front of the windows was discovered at Watkins Culver Antiques.



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“Every major room in the house has a bayou view,” says Wilson, who worked closely with Houston-based builder Jerry Chisolm and engineer Wilson Wan to ensure that the house (parts of which hang out over the water), once sited, wouldn’t slide off into that primordial body. “It took us three months just to put the foundation in the ground; normally it’s a three-week process,” says Chisolm, a partner of the Southampton Group. “It was pretty complex.” Safe base established, construction commenced, and the lofty home, with its stone walls, tiled gable roof and myriad windows, took shape. That’s when Barber, who’d come on board at the very beginning of the project and had spent months consulting with her clients, started installing the interiors.



**QUIET REFLECTION**

The entry foyer leads to the living room, dining room, study and master suite to one side, and to the kitchen, family room and children’s rooms on the other. The antique Italian cassone is from Watkins Culver Antiques; the mirror is from Formations in Los Angeles.



**INDUSTRIAL STRENGTH**  
McGuire stools from Ellouise Abbott in Houston pull up to a stainless steel-topped island in the kitchen; the fixture above was found at L.A.'s Dennis & Leen. Custom concrete countertops stretch across the back of the room.



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"I took them everywhere," laughs the designer of their trips to showrooms in Houston, Dallas and Los Angeles. "I really wanted them to get a feel for what was out there before we started buying." Visits to local favorites like Ellouise Abbott, Quatrine and Watkins Culver Antiques ultimately yielded finds that have now found a home alongside selections made at L.A.'s Rose Tarlow, Dennis & Leen and Michael Taylor Designs. "They wanted their home to be gracious and inviting, with a mix of fine antiques, high-end reproductions and very simple, tailored pieces," says Barber. "We also wanted to keep the color palette neutral, so I used subtle gradations in texture and shade to create interest while maintaining the sense of calm and serenity the homeowners were after." Barber made sure to personalize their surroundings as well, and placed one very special signature piece in the dining room.

**CORNER BOOTH**

Custom upholstered suede couches hug a mohair-covered ottoman, all from George Cameron Nash. The leather chair is from Bill Gardner Antiques and the seagrass rug is from Creative Flooring, both in Houston.



**STONE GROUND**  
A cache stone table at the end of the formal dining room holds a quartet of chunky, antique silver candlesticks and a carved torso figure, both from the homeowners' private collection.



**GREAT ESTATE**  
The house took two-plus years to complete; interior designer Ginger Barber continues to tweak the interiors as the family's needs evolve. The clay tile roof is from Roof Tile & Slate Co. in Carrollton, Texas.

**BOOK SMART**

A monarch horn chandelier dominates the library, where floor-to-ceiling bookshelves form a storied backdrop to a massive desk from Michael Taylor Designs in L.A. The chairs are custom upholstered in a Lee Jofa fabric.



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"They both ride, so right from the get-go, I said, 'We have got to fill that wall with a huge horse painting or photograph,'" says Barber. "I just knew I didn't want to do something expected like a mirror and console." So up went the striking, oversized equine that speaks to the home's traditional and contemporary aspects, and reflects its owners' lifestyle. "There were concerns in the beginning that this house would be too cold, but that's not the case at all," says Barber. "It is truly one of the most warm and wonderful homes I've ever done." **L**

**FOLLOW THROUGH**

The thick stone walls and gabled roof of the home are reminiscent of old European architecture, while other details—like the glass and wood "floating" front door—clearly announce its more contemporary side.