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Cliff Dwellers



Perched high atop a jagged hilltop with views stretching to the water, this lap-of-luxury Austin abode has everything its owners envisioned—and much, much more.

BY ALISON RICH
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARK KNIGHT



The impressive custom-made, double-door entryway, bordered by an opulent stained-glass creation, graciously sets the tone for the rest of the home.



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With a vista that practically defies description and a floor plan that incorporates those divine vantage points at every footstep, this lakeside lovely is grandeur epitomized. And while it looks as though this stone-enscenced Tuscan-style structure might have taken years to construct—actually might have been sitting pretty on this same spot for decades—and just as long to decorate and transform from vision to fruition, this Austin, Texas, retreat moved from idea to reality in just more than one year. The owners, retired empty nesters who desired an exquisite dwelling in which to entertain and host family gatherings, contacted Luis Jauregui, AIA, president of Austin-based Jauregui Builder and the lead architect and builder on the project. Entranced by other Jauregui projects they'd viewed in the area, the husband and wife knew that Jauregui and team were the perfect professionals for the large-scale project. Another big draw: A design/build company, Jauregui's firm stays with each





project from conception to completion, leaving no detail undone—right down to the furnishings and other decorator touches. After he presented them with his exquisitely engineered ideas, the couple gave Jauregui free reign to fabricate and festoon their domestic masterpiece.

“We designed the house to optimize the needs of an empty nester,” Jauregui says, noting that he incorporated all the luxuries they could dream of on one level to minimize trips up and down stairs. There’s no doubt that every visitor who beholds this breathtaking Lone Star residence will immediately be taken by its one-of-a-kind look. But beyond that, it’s the sky-high site itself that plays a starring role. “We had a lot of topography to work with,” he notes of the site, adding that while the project went off without any major hitches, it wasn’t without its fair share of challenges.

“It’s a 7-acre home site (and had) a very small buildable area,” he says. “We did some excavation on the upper side of the hill and created some retaining walls to create a larger

flat area. We moved along with the contours of the land and designed the house [to be] very long and shallow.” The negative-edge pool, which is flanked by huge rocks on one side and appears to cascade down the cliffside to the land far below, became the lot’s lower edge.

At the front of home, the custom-crafted stained-glass-bordered entryway is an unforgettable centerpiece. It’s as if the home is wrapping its arms around visitors with a friendly feel of welcoming warmth. Inside, a combination of refined-looking stones and earth-toned brick evokes a Tuscan-inspired feel, with furnishings and accessories placed in perfect proportion to the high ceilings—some bedecked with dark beams and others with brick—and the open floor plan. Red-hued marble that mimics the look of terracotta lines the floors, while arching pass-throughs, thick walls, and wrought iron on stairways and fixtures further the Italian-villa aesthetic.

Characterized by an elongated floor plan, the 8,100-square-foot, four-bedroom, five-and-a-



Dark wood beams on the ceiling above impart an old-world feel, while curvaceous doorways open the spaces and help the rooms flow effortlessly. The liberal use of glass gives generous glimpses of the expansive terrain beyond.

Arches above the cabinets merge gracefully with the earthy-hued ceiling, from which hangs an ornate wrought-iron fixture that further typifies this home's straight-from-Tuscany style.



half-bath structure is replete with huge expanses of glass in every living area. “The whole house is oriented to the view,” Jauregui says, noting that unless they’re in the laundry room or the powder room—the only two spaces sans views—guests are in for an eye-popping treat. No matter if they’re gathered for a formal fete in one of the home’s richly appointed living spaces or are languishing lazily in an informal interior spot, they are guaranteed a heavenly look at the rolling-hilled landscape, which is licked languidly by the gently flowing waters of Lake Austin.

“Another very nice feature was a study for him with a catwalk that connects to the living area,” Jauregui continues. The team created the formal living area as an extension of the study—again optimizing traffic patterns and forging an easy flow from one bright and airy zone to the next. The kitchen, breakfast area, and family room comprise one large space that opens to the view of the lake and the Hill Country. In the kitchen, smartly placed behind-the-range storage—which also houses a microwave, a pantry, and a coffee

center—helps cut down on clutter by giving the chef out-of-the-way places to stow culinary wares. “There’s almost a kitchen behind the kitchen,” Jauregui says of the surreptitiously incorporated surplus storage.

Because the main theme of this home is its relationship to the outdoors, Jauregui and team integrated plenty of opportunities for the homeowners and their guests to enjoy the surrounding panorama and feel at peace with their environment. “With that kind of view, you want to be out in that area,” Jauregui says.

The indoor/outdoor connection is further emphasized by the wide covered terraces on the back patio that also help mitigate heat gain from the westerly exposure—a big boon during the sizzling Texas summers. Several seating vignettes provide comfy spots in which to relax and enjoy the surroundings. A fireplace provides a cozy spot for escaping from a cool chill, while the summer kitchen with its barbecue pit and refrigerator is an oasis from the heat. “All of these connect directly to the swimming pool and the view,” Jauregui says.

Shimmering regally at dusk, the negative-edge waterway creates a natural-looking boundary at the cliff's edge, beckoning loungers to take a dip.





All told, it took the team “15 to 16 months to complete and have everything ready, including furnishings,” Jauregui says. The owners took up residence there in 2005. And while this Texas treasure wasn’t Jauregui’s most complicated project in his 27-year history of architecture and building, it’s because of his and his team’s experience with even more elaborate jobs that enabled them to make such quick—and incredible—work of this one. “We’ve done more complex, larger projects,” Jauregui says, “and that’s probably why we were able to perform on a dime and turn it around very quickly and efficiently.”

Oftentimes, when people want to construct a custom home of this magnitude and then hire a raft of workers from different companies—an architect from one firm, a contractor from another, and then interior designers from yet another company—the timeframe becomes

considerably longer, Jauregui notes. “That process could easily [have doubled] the time that we ended up spending,” he says.

And while, as the saying goes, good things come to those who wait, Jauregui derived great pleasure watching this project come together with such capable proficiency. “I think this house, more than any of my other houses, has been the epitome of instant gratification because it was so quick [time-wise] for a project of this scope,” he says. “We were able to move them right into their home without spending many years in the process and get a very customized look [that’s] perfect for their lives.”

The happy homeowners are thrilled with their Hill Country haven, which is perfect for them and the lifestyle they lead. Jauregui and his team echo their sentiment. “This house is close to our sweet spot,” he says. “It’s a castle on a hill.”



Boasting an artisan aesthetic fit for royalty, the master suite is a serene spot for escaping the hustle and bustle of the day.