

CUTTING EDGE

By Julie Catalano Photography by Paul Bardagjy

Austin designer, photographer and writer Darwin Harrison wanted a home where he could indulge his passion for form, space, colors and textures against a rock-solid backdrop. So he designed and built one.





Owner of Darwin Harrison Design in Austin, Harrison knew from the start which element would dominate among a crowd of favorites. “I have always been drawn to materials that have strong presence; materials that look good but just as importantly feel good and age well,” he says. “Stone and rammed earth were high on that list from day one.”

Wanting a limestone that fit into the neighborhood (“but at the same time was not exactly like all the other Hill Country limestones”) Harrison used TexaStone Quarries in Garden City for large roughback blocks for the front facade, and A.J. Brauer Stone in Jarrell for large scale blocks thicker in width, ideal for the impressive freestanding curving wall along the driveway.

Inside, the cut stone wall in the living area sets the tone for Harrison’s design vision of balancing clean and elegant with warm and comfortable. Here, the classic gable shape of the

exterior is reflected in the soaring ceiling, where Douglas fir (“one of my favorite woods”) is used for the rafters; reclaimed oak for the horizontal deck of the ceiling is also used for the flooring for continuity.

The large sectional with chaise, chairs and ottoman are by Minotti, from Smink(Dallas). All interior walls are painted Simply White from Benjamin Moore, “a clean, bright, museum-like white for the artwork.” Harrison and his partner Robert agreed on the monochromatic paint scheme: “We didn’t want a lot of colors that would detract from the diverse palette of materials..”

The home’s interior layout, he explains, “was dictated by the trees, so we split up the volumes to create courtyards.” Three of them, in fact. The indoor/outdoor connection was essential in the striking 3,200-square-foot structure, and nowhere is that more evident than in the “glass cube” breakfast area, where “it feels like you’re sitting in a park,” says Har-



risson, who designed the antique heart pine and aluminum table that was fabricated by Wells Mason of Ironwood Studios in Coupland and sits on a floor of Lueders 16x40 limestone planks.

Another strong outdoor connection is seen in the long hallway that provides the design elements of order and rhythm that Harrison employs. He is amused by some of the reactions the 102-foot-long space evokes. “One visitor said, ‘I’m just not sure about this hallway,’” he recalls. Upon closer look, however, details emerge that actually break up the journey: parts of the smooth polished concrete floor are juxtaposed with sec-

tions featuring a fine sandpaper feel from a burnishing agent. Views through the hallway’s expanse of glass include Harrison’s beloved — and big — block of stone from TexaStone Quarries. “It was a discarded piece they considered junk, but I looked at it and had to have it. It’s a perfect bench.”

Lighting is almost a third inhabitant of the house and a life form all its own. With assistance from Jill Klores, a talented lighting designer in Dallas, numerous dramatic and creative lighting features and fixtures were placed throughout, starting with colorful Bocci globes by the front door, customizable in type of bulb, color and cord length. A James Turrell-inspired

skylight with changing LED colors is off the sitting room; a hidden backlight in the living area “throws light all the way up the wall and really highlights the texture of the stone;” and a much-loved and very quirky chandelier by famed designer Ingo Maurer made the trip from the couple’s former home to its new shining spot over the breakfast table. “It comes with parchment paper sketches that you hang from the clips. We changed them out with architectural photos.”

Photography by Lubbock native Harrison is a big part of the couple’s art collection. A sizable montage of buildings from his hometown region graces the hallway after its time



on display at the San Angelo Museum of Fine Arts.

Intriguing surfaces and surprising details are everywhere, lending depth and interest and sparking conversations about history, art and design. The redwood wall behind the vanity in the master dressing area is shou-sugi-ban, Japanese burned wood sourced at Delta Millworks of Austin. “It’s a traditional technique originally designed to make the wood more resistant to termites and other insects.” Burned wood is also used on the back wall of the master bedroom and its nearby sliding barn door.

The master bath countertop is post-consumer recycled paper from Richlite, stacked and soaked with a phenolic resin, then heated and pressurized. “It’s amazing,” says Harrison. “It’s hard and crazy dense and you can’t believe how heavy it is, but it’s really beautiful and durable.”

The range of materials in the house is something Harrison is especially proud of. “It’s really diverse, and I think it all works together,” he says, pointing out the nostalgia-inducing Roman red brick in the sitting room, aluminum shingles with a sculpted pattern and exposed steel columns.

Harrison’s studio is a special haven, replete with CDs, books, collectibles and a poignant reminder from long ago: his very own LEGO® bricks from childhood, now embedded forever in the rammed earth wall. “They are what got me interested in architecture and design and putting things together.”

Although the home was originally designed to encourage entertaining, the couple finds that it has become more of a quiet retreat and welcoming sanctuary, what Harrison calls his dream home. “Now when we travel, we can’t wait to get back here.” ♦

DESIGNER Darwin Harrison
806-543-8302
www.darwin-harrison.com

