

From a foyer for greeting guests to a spa for ending the day, this South Austin home has

A Space for Everything



By Wolfred Gray - Photography by Allison Cartwright

When artist and sculptor Wayne Ledford moved to Austin, he needed a home that blended gallery and studio space for his work, but also included plenty of space for the rest of his life. In an overgrown lot in South Austin, he saw the potential to create something wonderful. Behind the thickets and briars were magnificent mature hardwood trees, and the gentle hill that could afford a view of downtown and the western horizon. "It needed a bit of editing," he understates, "or perhaps 'curating' would be a better term." That editing process culminated with the construction of his three-story dream home while preserving as much open space as possible. "I wanted a space outside that was very private, yet felt like a park. Having this personal green space so close to downtown is pure magic."

Starting from a vacant lot, siting the house was very important. "I didn't want to look out my windows and see someone else's wall. I wanted to see the trees, not structures." Fortunately, the unique lot allowed that perfect combination. "With no houses next to mine, and with views of mature trees in every direction, it is

sometimes easy to forget that I'm a mile from downtown. Many times, the songbirds outside are all I really hear."

Being a mile from downtown Austin carries a lot of benefits, these days. The Boulton Creek neighborhood where Ledford built his home has become quite the sought-after location, with neighborhood cafes and restaurants a short walk in every direction from his front door. "It wasn't always like this," he reminds us, "but now, I wouldn't live anywhere else in Austin. It really is the best." With a blend of historic and contemporary homes, the neighborhood doesn't cleave to any one look, and every home can be unique, which suited Ledford quite well as an artist.

From the street, many passersby assume his house is a condo. "Having two garage doors throws everyone off. But no - it's one house." Why two garages? "I didn't want a double garage door facing the street, and having two one-car garage doors looked more balanced. It also allowed me to have a workshop in one garage, while my truck stayed nice and clean in the other. So, it solved a design challenge, while providing a side bonus."

The primary design challenge throughout the neighborhood is quite simple: the lots are very narrow, most of them around 50 feet wide. "That leaves two basic choices," Ledford explains, "long and narrow, or tall and narrow. For me, the choice was obvious: up!" Going upward preserved more of his land for landscaping, and helped him reach up for the views and light. The next question was style. "I decided to go eclectic, rather than choosing one single style. I borrowed heavily from Victorian row houses, using bay windows and a cornice at the top, but I used materials more in tune with Hill-country houses, such as cedar, metal, and limestone."



The first floor is the space that meets the outside world, from the foyer in front to the atrium in back. "I think it's important to have a foyer - a place to greet guests. It helps make that transition from outside to inside. It's a part of offering hospitality to guests that is often overlooked." The atrium leading to the back yard provides a gentle transition from inside to outside as well, while bringing in lots of light without bringing in the sun's heat. It also gets the best view of the yard that lies beyond, beckoning the visitor to explore the park-like space.

The kitchen-dining space takes up the balance of the first floor. "The kitchen works. It's efficiently laid out, and just a joy to work in. For prepping and plating food, it's wonderful. But it's more than that. I can watch hummingbirds from my kitchen sink while they enjoy my garden outside, or I can relax in the breakfast nook with some tea and a laptop. So it's not a room that's just about food - it's a space that flows throughout my whole day." The dining room can easily seat eight - ten in a pinch - so even large gatherings are no problem.



One common thread that flows through all the spaces is the attention to detail. The years that Ledford lived in Europe informed many of his design choices. "I loved their appreciation of craftsmanship. I wanted that same appreciation to come through in every detail of the house." One of the distinctive details about the house are the hand-textured walls, which Ledford sculpted himself. "I realize that texture is a matter of taste, but to artists - particularly sculptors - texture is vital. I've had more than one person ask me to teach them how to do it themselves. Everyone responds to it differently, but nearly everyone reaches out and touches it. It's tactile."

Spaces to get away from it all

In the middle of a busy city, of course, it's always nice to have some space to get away from it all. "For reading or just quiet relaxing, there's no better place than the study. I've spent a great deal of time there, and it's probably my favorite individual room. There's something about the light and the layout that is very peaceful and soothing." Then there is the spa upstairs for truly indulgent relaxation. Having a jacuzzi and dressing area in a space by themselves, rather than cloistered in the master suite, opens up the option of having guests use them as well. "Everyone needs relaxation - even guests."





A view from the upper floor, from Wayne Ledford's "sunset collection"

There are several spaces in the house that could have multiple purposes. At the top of the first set of stairs, there is the sitting room. "My vision for that room was to be gallery space for important art pieces, since it has great light, yet never receives direct sunlight from any window, which is important for art work. But, for the same reason, it would also make an excellent space for a grand piano, or just a conversation furniture group." There is also a home office that could double as a gym or a playroom.

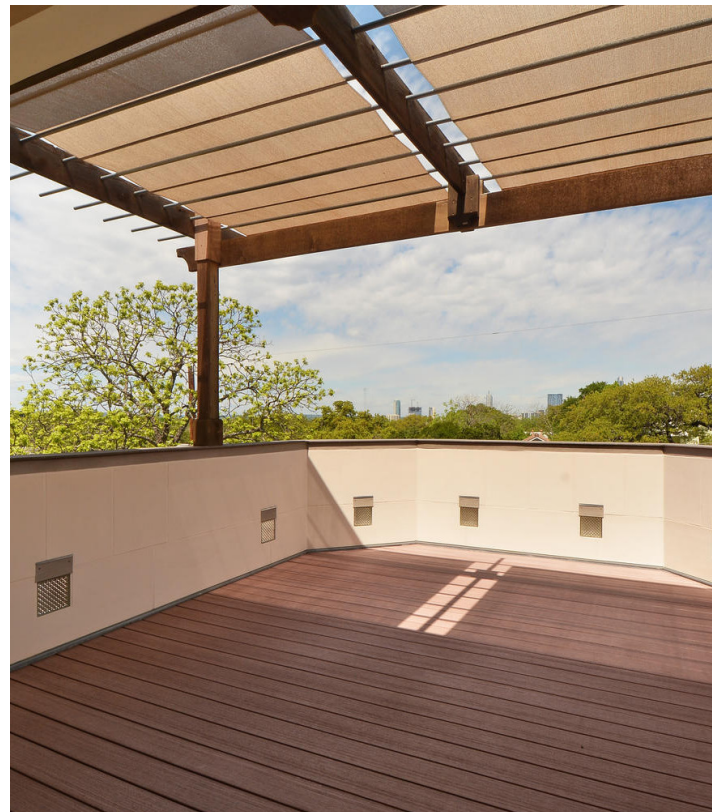
Taking it to the next level

To see over the tall, mature hardwood trees that fill the neighborhood, a third level was the only sure way to get the views he wanted. "Three-story homes are unusual, but the light and the views from the upper level make each step absolutely worth it. Even on cloudy days, the main room remains bright and inviting. Then there are the sunsets Texas is famous for - scenic nearly every day, and every day different from the one before. And in the evenings, the lights of the city create a fantastic backdrop for entertaining. The upper level is without a doubt the star of the house."



The change from the style of the rest of the house is the first surprise to greet visitors. "I wanted the upper level to have a loft-like feel, and so the detailing is much more contemporary than the rest of the house. Anything from mid-century modern to Scandinavian minimalism would work up here." With a media room for watching movies, catching the game, or vanquishing foes in video games, there is always something to do. "Having a fully-equipped wetbar in the middle of all the action is practically like having a second kitchen, right where I

need it." And with the inviting outdoor deck just outside the door, al fresco dining and barbecues come with a view. "The upper level is all about entertaining. It's my take on the 'open floorplan' concept, with a twist. I have guests over for everything from watching movies with surround sound to watching comets, eclipses, and fireworks. Most 'open floorplans' wouldn't allow any of those things. Being up high has many unexpected advantages - my neighbors even call me for weather reports, since I can see all the way to the horizon."



Having three levels requires careful thought about circulation through the house. "Putting the stairwell at the core of the house makes getting from any room to any other room very quick. It's a very efficient use of space." And the detailing of art niches, foot lighting, and glass handrails ensures that the trips are never boring. "I don't mind the stairs. At all. Plus, they keep me fit."

So whether it's displaying a prized piece of artwork, finding a quiet place for a book, or entertaining friends and family, Wayne Ledford truly has crafted a house with a space for everything.