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NATURAL EVOLUTION

A HISTORIC HOME SET ON THE BAYOU IN HOUSTON HONORS ITS PAST WHILE BEING REVAMPED INTO A MODERN HOUSE FOR A SOCIAL FAMILY.

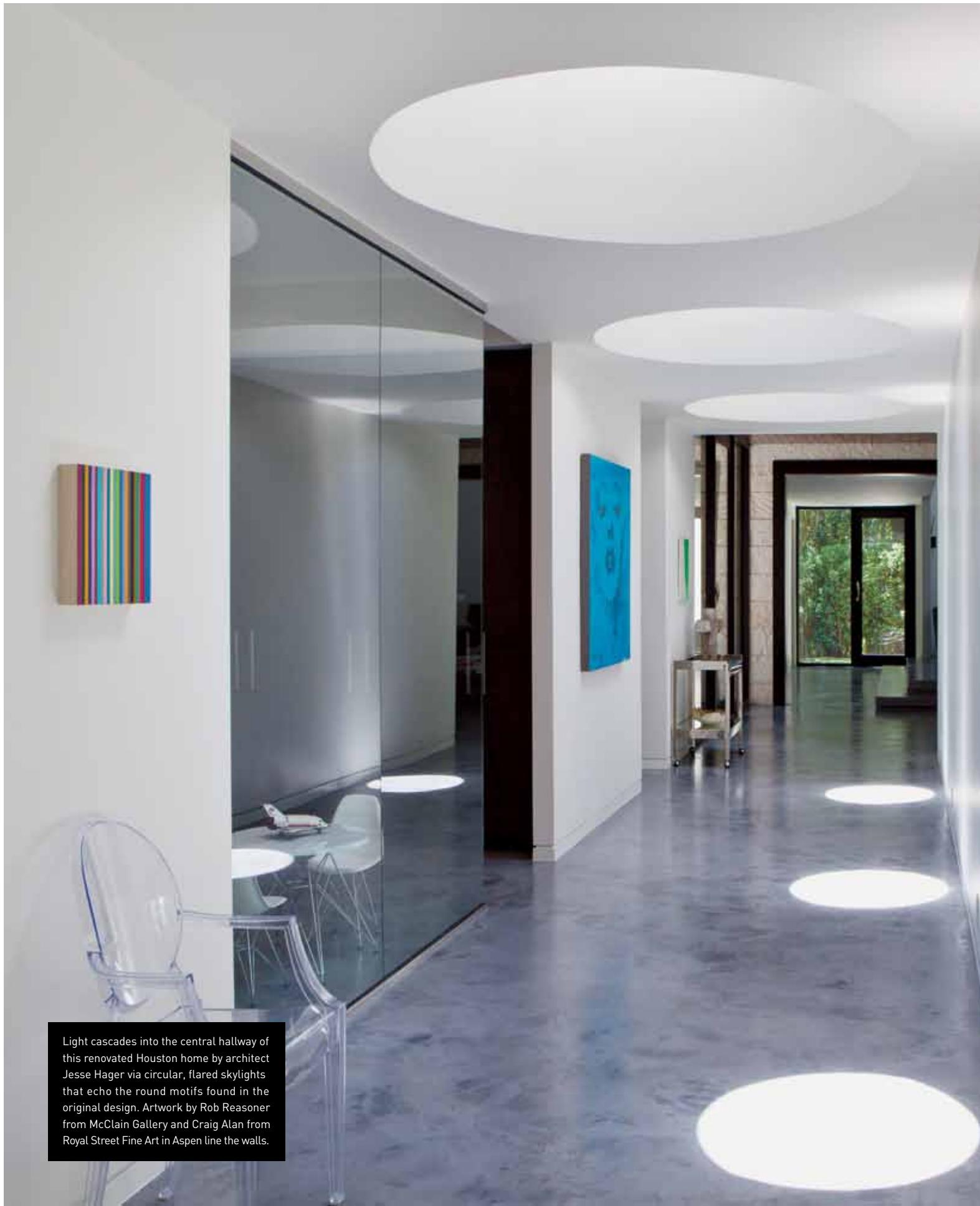
WRITTEN BY LISA BINGHAM DEWART PHOTOGRAPHY BY NICK JOHNSON



ARCHITECTURE Jesse Hager and Heather Rowell, Content
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE Kevin Steed, McDugald-Steele

Landscape Architects & Contractors

BEDROOMS 4 | BATHROOMS 5 | SQUARE FEET 8,000



Light cascades into the central hallway of this renovated Houston home by architect Jesse Hager via circular, flared skylights that echo the round motifs found in the original design. Artwork by Rob Reasoner from McClain Gallery and Craig Alan from Royal Street Fine Art in Aspen line the walls.



When a family started planning their return to Houston after a stint in Colorado, they thought they knew exactly what they wanted in a home: brand new construction filled with plenty of antiques. That was, however, until a chance encounter with a bayou residence, designed in the 1970s by well-regarded Texas architect Frank Welch, changed their minds. "Our vision was going to be Old World with modern elements mixed in," says the wife. "But once we found this house that idea didn't feel right anymore." Its great bones and contemporary vibe persuaded the family to take a leap of faith—to bring new life to an aging beauty—one made easier by the fact that architect Jesse Hager would be undertaking the ambitious remodel. "It's a fantastic home on a unique site, but it had

Comfortable modernism defines the house, as evidenced in the family room with its vintage Lucite Pace Collection chairs, Dellarobia sectional and chairs found on 1stdibs in an exuberant fabric. A niche carved out of the Texas limestone wall is the perfect spot for a Lyle Owerko piece from Esperson Gallery.



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some details that didn't age well," says Hager, who worked on the project with partner Heather Rowell. "The house wanted to engage with the landscape, but the location of windows and doors prevented direct connection."

Aided by the house's original plans, which allowed Hager to "see the underlying geometric leanings that were pretty common in the 1970s," the architect envisioned a near-total gut renovation. "Much of the interior was rearranged to accommodate the now open floor plan and proposed new layers of order," he says. Beginning outside, massive walls of Texas limestone offer an organizing presence, says Hager, "breaking things up and providing thresholds and transitions," as they transverse the house. Inside, the reconfigured entrance leads directly to the dining room, though, "we didn't want to give it all away up front and wanted a certain degree of privacy there."

In the dining room, Tony Duquette chandeliers by Remains Lighting hang above a pair of custom tables by United Metalsmiths. Milo Baughman chairs from Metro Retro Furniture, upholstered in Mokum fabric, offer color. Photographs by Steven Silverstein from Esperson Gallery hang above a custom buffet.



Tom Dixon pendants from Ligne Roset form a cluster above two Vladimir Kagan sofas covered in a Brochier fabric from ID Collection in the great room. They're joined by chairs from Reeves Antiques swathed in velvet from George Cameron Nash and a Karl Springer coffee table.



Landscape architect Kevin Steed used plantings with a more organic vibe, which offer a rich contrast to the architecture's rectilinear forms. Philippe Starck's Ghost chairs from Kartell surround a dining table crafted from a 1,300-year-old piece of cypress.



In the kitchen's breakfast area, iconic pieces of 20th-century design—a Saarinen table and walnut Cherner chairs, all from Design Within Reach—overlook a peaceful bayou view, captured by windows in dark bronze anodized frames. The Luceplan pendant is from Light.



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So, he broke up the space with a wooden screen, cleverly separating the room from the main axis, which runs perpendicular to the main entry. A central hall was extended through the interior, providing a cohesive spine for circulation throughout the single-story layout. In addition, ceiling heights were modified to increase the feeling of spaciousness.

Hager touched bedrooms and bathrooms, too, merging and reconfiguring them. The kitchen was also transformed into a sleek, contemporary space, and the entry sequence had its long, tube-like skylights traded in for flared versions that create a gallery-like effect. And, in the master bath, a shower door pockets into the wall to open onto the terrace and create an outdoor experience. There, the owners can take in the work of landscape architect Kevin Steed. "I fed off the architecture," Steed says of the inspiration he used to create a program that parallels the house, using materials like

An island sheathed in Marmara white marble from M S International and inset with stained sapele wood stands as the kitchen's focal point. A Hansgrohe faucet and stainless-steel Kohler sink add a bit of shine to the sleek space. Sapele also covers the floating Sub-Zero refrigerators, which conceal the butler's pantry.



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Giant Ligularia and Katrina Iris to maintain interest. Adds Hager, "The couple entertains often and wanted an indoor-outdoor feel. The goal was to bring the landscape inside and the house outside."

Realizing their original rustic, old-world vision wouldn't fly for the interiors in the revamped house, the wife embarked on an intensive three-month research project to wrap her mind around pursuing a minimal aesthetic. "We were aiming for a unique, organic vibe and clean spaces to display exquisite furniture and art," says the wife. "If I wasn't obsessed with a piece, it didn't find a home here." While she kept things simple, choosing one or two knockout pieces to define each room, such as dynamite Vladimir Kagan sofas in the great room or Tony Duquette fixtures by Remains Lighting in the dining room, there are added "elements of glamour." Each area was about layering. Hence, the wife created accent

To meet the family's entertaining needs, multiple seating areas are peppered throughout the house, including an intimate zone in a corner of the great room. Defined by a sofa from Matizza, the space also boasts a George Nakashima table. A pair of Hermès scarves in shadow boxes lends whimsy.



David Hicks wallpaper from Kravet in a trellis pattern singles out a corner of the kitchen. Flanked by custom cabinets and hardware designed by Content, the spot provides a chic, central location for the wife's study.



Royal purple draperies from High Fashion Fabrics shield the windows in the master bedroom. Color also comes from the midcentury side chair, a family heirloom that the wife had recovered in a Donghia fabric. Wood side tables flank the bed while a photograph by Gray Malin enlivens the area.



The Americh tub from Westheimer Plumbing & Hardware with a Dornbracht floor-mounted tub filler takes center stage in the master bathroom. The shower includes a door that pockets into the wall and opens to the exterior.

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walls and even accent ceilings: a chic snakeskin sheaths part of the master bedroom's ceiling. The stunning waterfall kitchen island required visits to five marble yards to find the perfect slab. Elsewhere, she played up textures, covering a wall in one of her sons' rooms with luxurious felt and adding a wall of natural stone tiles in a bathroom.

Not long ago, Hager had the chance to see Welch speak. "He said that architecture is not stagnant," Hager explains, "and that it lives and breathes and changes." For Hager's part, this motto couldn't ring more true. He has breathed new life into this house, set the stage for the evolution of his clients' lives, and cemented the continued evolution of this home. □

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