

MODERN LUXURY

HOUSTON

CHEZ
COCO
CHANEL

THE HOUSE'S
FALL COUTURE
FROM FASHION'S
ICONIC ADDRESS

HOLIDAY
LUXE

UNFORGETTABLE
GIFT IDEAS

PLUS

RIVER OAKS
DISTRICT BOWS

CINEMA ARTS FESTIVAL
SPACES OUT

FIERCE FEMALES
OF H-TOWN LIT!

Philanthropy
PORTFOLIO I.

THE TOP PLAYERS, GALAS
& CAUSES OF THE SEASON



WARM TIDINGS
Wood floors and ceilings—and even the central courtyard's wooden decking around the pool—balance the cool glass and steel of Jeff and Leigh Bell's smart new Montrose contemporary.

MONTROSE MOD

Dad wanted masculine minimal. Mom wanted warm, practical and family-friendly. With this new home's clever architecture, everybody wins!

By Chris Kelly

Photography by Benjamin Hill & Pete Molick

“Building a house can end a marriage,” laughs Leigh Bell, 40. The petite and decidedly fun-loving writer mom says that if left up to her husband, Jeff, 49, their family of five would live in a house of glass, steel and concrete. “Very austere—like Philip Johnson’s Glass House,” she says. “But I like warmth, and especially with our children, something a little softer.” The couple pooled their ideas and collaborated with local architect Jesse Hager of Content Architecture (contentarchitecture.com). The result is a stunning two-story, 5,200-square-foot contemporary home in Montrose, which was completed in May and featured in last month’s prestigious A.I.A. Home Tour.

The front of the house is a combination of textures with a light-brown brick facade on the first level and a warm wood facade on the second. Both floors boast walls of glass, with wood screens on the ground floor that can be opened to let in light and views of the trees, or closed for privacy. On this afternoon, the inside of the Bells’ home is filled with the sounds of their three adorable children—6-year-old Poppy, 5-year-old Paloma and 4-year-old Dutch—giggling and racing about in their upstairs playroom.

The whole family likes to hang out in the open living area on the first floor. With several glass windows that reach all the way up to nearly

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BIG SPLASH From left: A mod, deck-wrapped pool highlights the central courtyard in the backyard; the large kitchen boasts a long white-marble-topped island and, as befitting a family with three youngsters, spare and sturdy furniture. Nearby, the dining room's hefty wooden monk's table is beneath a ceiling paneled with oak.



...CONTINUED 12-foot ceilings, the room is integrated with both the leafy front yard and the sublime courtyard. The atmosphere is airy, light-filled and connected with nature.

As throughout most of the house—whose decor continues to evolve since it was staged for *Houston* magazine's architectural photos—the walls are white with no baseboard, giving the illusion they are floating just above the light-brown oak floors.

Also on the first floor is a guest bedroom that doubles as a place for the kids to leave their wet swimsuits and towels after some fun in the pool. The floor is concrete, and there's a private garden that Leigh says "is for when our guests want to get away from us!"

On the second level, the children's wing is a magical place with a large playroom that features a mini trampoline and what looks to be a long, built-in, L-shaped cabinet on the floor but is actually a tunnel. The energetic Paloma, an aspiring ballerina, happily demonstrates as she crawls in one end and moments later triumphantly emerges from the other. *Ta-da!* There's a giant chalkboard upon which is mounted a large A that has special significance to the Bells. "Jeff and I were in Tulsa and they were tearing down an Adams

Mark Hotel. Jeff asked if he could have the 'A' in the sign, and they gave it to him!"

Off the playroom are three kids' bedrooms, each gently bathed in natural light by what Hager calls "a light monitor." This is a variation of the standard skylight, with sunlight wafting in from a narrow, seemingly secret place between the top of the wall and the ceiling.

Down a long hall, the parents' wing incorporates activity with tranquility. There's a small exercise room and an office, both of which have treetop views. There are two balconies, which also reach out into the oaks and other native trees of Montrose. There are floor-to-ceiling glass walls and an oak ceiling.

The most luxurious part of the master bath is a Japanese-style bathing area with teakwood flooring and an insanely deep teakwood tub with a shower on the side. "First you shower and then you slip into a hot bath and soak," Jeff explains.

In this masterfully designed home for five, there is something for everyone. And the best part is that after all of the decisions and compromises during the two years it took to build it, Jeff and Leigh *still* love each other! And their home. Leigh looks around the house and smiles, "We made it!" ■



PRIVACY PLEASE The bright second-floor "kids zone" is separated from the master by a long hall. "The next thing we're going to add is barbed wire," dad Jeff Bell jokes.