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FASHION-FORWARD DESIGN TRENDS FOR SPRING
COMFORT ZONE

DETAILS AND DECOR MAKE A PERSONAL STATEMENT FOR A MODERN HOUSE IN A HISTORIC SAN ANTONIO NEIGHBORHOOD

By Mina Bergstrom
Photography by Casa Redington
If there are two design concepts proverbial to cloth, there would be "modest" and "easy" — the soul and source of architecture. And yet, a San Antonio residence deftly sidesteps the incompatibility potential emboldened in those two notions. The result is a light-filled four-bedroom, 4,000-sf steel, glass and marble house that radiates an engaging luminosity. The subdued essence of opulent ideas is the product of a collaboration between San Antonio architect John Graham, designers Blanca Graham and D'Epina Cullin, and a style-savvy client.

Homemaker Susan Mc Gee, president of a money management firm, is something of a behemoth of banking circles. She raised her three children in San Antonio’s Alamo Heights but downsized after they grew up and moved out. Mc Gee relocated to a smaller line house in the Summerhill community north of town, but after a few years, the busy executive decided she needed a bigger home. “My kids are married and now come home with their own kids,” she says. “I couldn’t fit all of them in my house.”

When the perennial money manager found a piece of property in Alamo Heights’ quieter cottage district, she purchased it
and associate architets John Grubbie to design his house on the long, 500-acre oceanfront site. "The ocean drives," says Grubbie, "is a collection of one-story wide cottages built in the 1920s. His challenge was to be consistent—how to place a modern house in a setting of nautical dwellings (some of which are Sears catalog kit houses sold directly through mail order by Sears, Roebuck and Co.) between 1910 and 1960. McGee armed Grubbie with historic examples of houses and materials, she liked all of them expressing resolution in some way: the oak, glass walls, lens of windows, squared-off profiles, hip rooflines and sliding glass doors that bring easy access to the outdoors. "We saw something in the images Susan brought to us," says Grubbie. He drew up a plan that celebrated glass and oak, but that acknowledged them with cinematic precision. Big window bands morphed from slats that wrap around the windows a square plan—stipped by a second story that Grubbie positioned in the back half of the house—references the Craftsman style common in the neighborhood, and a pitch eave along the front of the house. "The house is friendly and on a human scale," says McGee.

The interior of the 5,000-square-foot dwelling tells the same story. Living room, dining room and kitchen are open to each other, and all flow into a concrete area that surrounds the house. "That was important," says McGee. "My daughter lives in Los Angeles, and I like the way the backyards there are used as rooms." There was nothing McGee wanted more than to be able to move in, out and through her house with ease.

She engaged Dallas interior designer Grubbie to help select the furniture and accessories. "Susan has a tremendous sense of scale," says Grubbie. "And she also has a fabulous collection of shoes." What she equated to Grubbie was that her charm was all in color and shape, and that these elements would figure into the pieces she selected for the house. The designer ran her eyes from McGee's surround flue. "She always wears something very understated," Grubbie notes, "so the house is in great balance, beautiful shoes and a piece of jewelry." A case in point are the living room bookshelves, "books are clean, I told Susan," says Grubbie. McGee agreed but replied, "Yes, and I need them." The conversation highlights one of Grubbie's precepts: "I design for the entire 360 days of the year—not the five days when family comes home for the holidays." she says. "I want to focus on what happens when you come home from work every day, kick off your shoes, and sit down and have a glass of wine." That's also the reason Grubbie designed two dining tables. For those holiday dinners, the tables can be put together, but McGee uses them separately some of the time—on a library table where she reads books and magazines; the other as an informal dining area.

More was needed, but Grubbie advised her client: "You should get in this house and live in it." McGee complied and a year and a half later concluded that her house seemed cold. "I read a lot, and it's my refuge," she says. "I want it to be light and say, 'I'm home.'"
At that point, though, Grable had moved to her family ranch and was occupied with making it livable. At the recommendation of her contractor, Tony Siller, McGee suggested to GOODspeed, a thickly planted home decor and design store, the owner, D’Erica Cole, best known for her decorating strategies. She was a pioneer in the eclectic movement, and the co-founder of Uncommon Objects in Austin and Charm in Westover. She was also the in-house designer at Fredericksburg’s Red Oak, moved to San Antonio in 2010 and set up shop in the Dignowity Hill neighborhood.

“I loved D’Erica’s store,” says McGee. “I said to her, I’d be happy if she made my house look like that.” Cole said, “I think it’s needed to look like our house.” She suggested a Kent Soward rug in the living room—a colorful, mismatched pattern, which coordinates to the space. She also added a goose egg blue velvet sofa and hung a pair of printed metal her father on the wall between the sofa, the bookshelves. Cole lined the house with entry flowers—especially in the master bedrooms, where she covered one wall in multicolored-patterned wallpaper, painted the wall behind the bed in blue and framed the windows in an off-white linen with white sheers. Anderson.

“As the house was already spectacular on the big level,” says Cole. “Now it’s spectacular on a holistic, one-year head level too.” The arrangement seems to merge with the city, revealing the house with what Grable calls “poetry.” McGee got her glasses at one house, but she got it her way, minus the sternly characteristic of modernism. “My house is warm and cozy,” she says. “It’s modern, but has a great sense of individuality.”

## VENDORS

- ARTWORK
  - Modernist at Goodspeed
  - Pomegranate Fine Art

- COIL & SON
  - Wallpaper in master bedroom

- DESIGN WITHIN REACH
  - Chairs around eating area

- FORTUNATI
  - Headboards in kitchen and bath

- JONATHAN ADLER
  - Carstens in master bedroom

- KATE SPADE
  - Rug in living room and master bedroom

- RESTORATION HARDWARE
  - Self-framing under stairwell

- SCHUMACHER
  - Stately light in hallway

- SORRENTO
  - Chunky knob handles around pool

- WESTERN WINDOW SYSTEMS
  - Doors throughout

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**TYPE**

Single-family home

**LOCATION**

San Antonio

**ARCHITECTURE**

John Colella
John Colella Architects

**CONTRACTOR**

Tony Siller
Terry Building Concepts
www.terrybuilding.com

**INTERIOR DESIGN**

Shawna Grable
Three Doors Interior Design
designthreedoors.com

D’Erica Cole
D’Erica Cole Design Solutions and
GOODspeed
www.goodspeedinc.com

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**DESIGNER**

D’Erica Cole