

MODERN LUXURY

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# Interiors

TEXAS

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MODERN MASTERPIECES BY SAN ANTONIO'S  
JOHN GRABLE & DALLAS' BODRON+FRUIT

FASHION-FORWARD DESIGN TRENDS FOR SPRING



The image shows a modern, multi-story house with a large glass-enclosed patio. The patio has a dark metal frame and a concrete ceiling. Inside the patio, there are two wooden armchairs with white cushions and two patterned ottomans. The courtyard outside is lush with greenery, including palm trees and various shrubs. A swimming pool is visible in the foreground. The overall atmosphere is bright and modern.

# COMFORT ZONE

SAN ANTONIO

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

*By Helen Thompson  
Photography by Dror Baldinger*

San Antonio-based  
landscape architect  
Terry Lewis, who grew  
up in the neighborhood,  
created a lush, tropical  
setting for the courtyard.

If there are two design concepts preordained to clash, they would be "modernist" and "cozy"—the oil and water of architecture. And yet, a San Antonio residence deftly sidesteps the incompatibility potential embedded in those two notions. The result is a light-filled four-bedroom, 4 1/2-bath steel, glass and stucco house that radiates an engaging hominess. The adroit mix of oppositional ideas is the product of a collaboration between San Antonio architect John Grable, designers Rhonda Grubbs and D'Ette Cole, and a style-confident client.

Homeowner Susan McGee, the president of a money management firm, is something of a bellwether of housing trends. She raised her three children in San Antonio's Alamo Heights but downsized after they grew up and moved out. McGee relocated to a zero-lot-line house in the Sonterra golf 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 into my house."

When the peripatetic money manager found a piece of property in Alamo Heights' quaint cottage district, she purchased it



Clockwise from top: A black Kate Spade rug with a bow tie pattern anchors the bed in the master bedroom; a black-and-white African mud cloth slipcover revs up a love seat next to the Saarinen breakfast table; stacked baskets and a gold-flocked cowhide rug enliven the seating area under the staircase.

Designer D'Ette Cole placed a gray sectional and leather club chairs in the living room. Next to a Hans Wegner chair is a tonal curio case to the colorful Kate Spade rug. Privacy from the street is assured thanks to the 8-foot courtyard wall and the strategically placed high window above the sofa.

and contacted architect John Grable to design a house to fit the long, 50-foot-wide corner lot. "The cottage district," says Grable, "is a collection of one-room-wide cottages built in the '20s." His challenge was going to be interesting—how to place a modern house in a setting of nostalgic dwellings (some of which are Sears catalog kit houses sold mostly through mail order by Sears, Roebuck and Company between 1908 and 1940).

McGee arrived in Grable's office bearing examples of houses and materials she liked, all of them expressing modernism in some way—flat roofs, glass walls, lots of windows, squared-off profiles, big overhangs and sliding glass doors that invite easy access to the outdoors. "We saw something in the images Susan brought to us," says Grable. He drew up a plan that celebrated glass and metal but that elaborated on them with artisanal lyricism. Big overhangs morphed into slatted arbors that jut out above the windows; a square profile—topped by a second story that Grable positioned at the back half of the house—references the Craftsman silhouette common in the neighborhood; and a porch stretches along the front of the house. "The house is friendly and on a human scale," says the architect.

The interior of the 3,000-square-foot dwelling tells the same story. Living room, dining room and kitchen are open to each other, and all face into a courtyard around which the house is built. "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 Grubbs to help assemble furniture and accessories. "Susan has a tremendous sense of style," says Grubbs, "and she also has a fabulous collection of shoes." What that signaled to Grubbs was that her client was alert to color and shape, and that those elements would figure into the pieces she selected for the house. The designer took her cues from McGee's sartorial flair. "She always wears something very understated," Grubbs notes, "and then layers it with a great handbag, beautiful shoes and a piece of jewelry."

A case in point are the living room's bookshelves. "Books are clutter," I told Susan," says Grubbs. McGee agreed but replied, "Yes, and I read them." The conversation highlights one of Grubbs' precepts. "I design for the other 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 Grubbs suggested two dining tables. For those holiday dinners, the tables can be put together, but McGee uses them separately most of the time—one as a library table where she stacks books and magazines; the other as an intimate dining venue.

More was needed, but Grubbs 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 travel a lot, and it's my refuge," she says. "I want to walk in, sigh and say, 'I'm home!'"



Color is key in the streamlined kitchen where Cole punctuated the island with lime green bar stools from Design Within Reach. Taking her cue from the red knobs on the Wolf stove, the designer added a bright red credenza in the eating area, further dramatized with black-molded Eames chairs.

The exterior's white stucco is animated throughout the day by changing shadows cast by the steel arbor shading the front porch.



In the pantry, Schumacher's Queen of Spain wallpaper glazes in a champagne color, and two wine-colored rugs set the stage in front of built-in cabinetry.

## DESIGN DETAILS

**TYPE**  
Single-family home

**LOCATION**  
San Antonio

**ARCHITECTURE**  
John Grable  
John Grable Architects  
johngrable.com

**CONTRACTOR**  
Trey Siller  
Ironside Building Group  
ironsidebuilders.com

**INTERIOR DESIGN**  
Rhonda Grubbs  
Three Graces Interiors  
threegracesinteriors.com

D'Ette Cole  
D'Ette Cole Design Solutions and  
GOODgoods  
goodgoodstx.com

## VENDORS

**ARTERIORS**  
Goat-legged table in living room  
arteriorshome.com

**COLE & SON**  
Wallpaper in master bedroom  
cole-and-son.com

**DESIGN WITHIN REACH**  
Chaises around swimming pool,  
Hans Wegner chairs in dining room  
dwr.com

**FORTIS**  
Hardware in kitchen and bath  
fortisfaucet.com

**JONATHAN ADLER**  
Curtains in master bedroom  
jonathanadler.com

**KATE SPADE**  
Rugs in living room and master  
bedroom  
katespade.com

**RESTORATION HARDWARE**  
Sofa and rug under stairwell  
restorationhardware.com

**SONNEMAN**  
Six light in kitchen  
sonnemanawayoflight.com

**WEST ELM**  
Chunky planters around pool  
westelm.com

**WESTERN WINDOW SYSTEMS**  
Doors throughout  
westernwindowssystems.com

At that point, though, Grubbs had moved to her family ranch and was occupied with making it livable. At the recommendation of her contractor, Trey Siller, McGee stopped into GOODgoods, a funky stylish home decor and design store. The owner, D'Ette Cole, is well-known for her decorating derring-do. She was a pioneer in the junktique movement, and she co-founded Uncommon Objects in Austin and Clutter in Warrenton. She was also the in-house designer at Fredericksburg's Red. Cole moved to San Antonio in 2010 and set up shop in the Dignowity Hill neighborhood.

"I loved D'Ette's store," says McGee. "I told her I'd be happy if she made my house look like that." Cole demurred: "I knew it needed to look like her house." She introduced a Kate Spade rug into the living room—its colorful marbled pattern wildly invigorating to the space. She also added a goat-legged side table and hung a pair of primitive wood hay forks on the wall between the sofa and the bookshelves above. Cole layered the house with witty flourishes—especially in the master bedroom, where she covered one wall in malachite-patterned wallpaper, painted the wall behind the bed inkberry gray and framed the windows in an off-white linen vibrant with silvery starbursts.

"This house was already spectacular on the big level," says Cole. "Now it's spectacular on a hold-in-your-hand level too." The architecture seems to merge with the details, endowing the house with what Grable calls "poetry." McGee got her glass and steel house, but she got it her way, minus the sterility characteristic of modernism. "My house is warm and inviting," she says. "It's modern but has a great sense of individuality." ■