

# Metropolitan Home

QUICK TIPS  
FOR TOWN  
OR COUNTRY  
ROOMS

INSTANT  
SUMMER  
STYLE

3 BLOOMIN'  
GARDEN PLOTS  
SPA FOOD



JULY  
AUGUST 1998  
USA \$3.50  
CANADA \$4.50  
UK £2.75  
Display Until  
August 10, 1998

ENTER THE  
MET HOME  
OF THE YEAR  
CONTEST



# Made in the Shade

A year-round house in Texas revels in the traditional summer breakdown of barriers between indoors and out. BY HELEN THOMPSON

**T**he summer heat in Texas is brutal, which is why the best houses have always straddled the demarcation between inside and out that characterizes cooler climes. When an artist began to plan her house in the hills that circle Austin, she returned to the basic principles of early Lone Star pioneers: Like her predecessors, she took to the heights for wafting breezes and shade trees.

The limestone exterior of this Sinclair Black house extends indoors. A soothing courtyard fountain offers cooling respite from the hot summer sun.

The original settlers built skinny houses just one-room wide so that breezes could whisk on through unskandered. This limestone dwelling, designed by architect Sinclair Black as an H-shaped

cluster of rooms, rises to the challenges of climate and topography by extending interiors beyond the confines' limestone walls. Summer's assault is further mitigated with sheltered patios, soothing fountains, cooling arbors and pergolas.

With its layered red roofs and mortar-washed native stone, the building looks like an Alsatian farmhouse that has been heavily influenced by Austin's pragmatic, vernacular architecture. "I wanted it to seem like a family of European farmers had settled here," says the owner.

"The house was intended to look like it had been built in stages," Black says. Through the raised main door, the entry is a long and sunny hall that stretches along the front of the house like a closed-in porch. Flanking the living/dining areas, a bedroom wing and a kitchen wing snuggle up to the main one as if they had been added on.



The house is the upshot of the owner's 1984 transcontinental travels with a band of friends that included Black. "We drove around for a month in a van," says the architect. "We would come across a room that was beautifully proportioned, and I would measure it." But because the home they envisioned was compact—just 3,000 square feet—Black took liberties with proportion and extended its reach into the landscape. The wings of the H-shaped plan enfold a gated entry; an expansive back courtyard verges onto an orchard.

Black encouraged the exchange between inside and out by using the same materials for the 16-inch-thick walls and doorways in both the living room and the back porch. Massive timbers of aromatic cedar, which is native to the area, punctuate interior spaces and serve as lintels for the shed roof that shades the back porch. High windows and transoms share borrowed views from room to room. The back porch's five French doors keep boundaries generously undefined—and well lit. "Part of our strategy," says the owner, "was to bring as much light as we could inside."

Outside, where the owner spends much of her time, the harsh Texas light is tempered by wisteria and

grapevines. Even in Austin's ravaging summer heat, cooling breezes drift through the leaves and across the water of the bubbling fountain. This balmy area acts as an air conditioner, providing sanctuary from Austin's long summers. Gravel provides an informal setting for favorite pastimes—entertaining and gardening.

"It's very peaceful here," says the owner. The sense of peace was achieved simply: With a modernist touch, the owner designed a grove of concrete columns—painted a bracing red—that mimic the cedar ones. They enclose the area, making an outside suite that the artist and garden designer regards as her second living room.

Open to the outdoors and comfortable in its site, the small house seems more ample than it is. "That is because we didn't let the walls limit our sense of space," says Black. And he didn't fill up all the available space either, allowing his client to do a little of her own adding on. "Since I've been here," the artist says, "I've planted an orchard and more gardens. A pigeon house is to come"—all of this after she plastered interior walls, painted and stenciled the pine floors and set a mosaic of beach stones in the entry courtyard.

Guests obviously enjoy the house as much as she does. They gravitate outside and linger around the gigantic limestone-slab dining table—a discard from a local quarry. "These huge pieces are sliced by machine," the homeowner explains, "and some break. You can just drive up and select the one you want." Hers, with its ragged edge and cut marks still visible, has supported many exuberant alfresco meals. "My best parties," says the inveterate hostess, "always end up outside."

*See Resources, last pages.*

Wisteria and grape-draped pergolas define the rear courtyard, with its ground cover of gravel and central fountain.

