



Fifth Time's a Charm

After finishing family house No. 5, serial home builder Michael Deane may finally be ready to settle down—for a while, at least

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The need to construct is an obvious instinct for any card-carrying builder. For those in the industry, creating one tangible product to see, feel and be proud of is not enough; the process must happen again and again, ad infinitum. Home builder Michael Deane goes so far as to say this occupational hazard is “like a disease.”

Deane—one of Austin’s preeminent custom home builders whose company, Michael Deane Homes, has been behind some of the city’s most luxurious properties since the company’s founding in 1995—admits to being bitten by the building bug. “I always have to have a project,” he says. Indeed, in the 10 years since Deane and his wife, Amy, have been married, the couple has built five family homes. That’s an average of one every *two* years.

“In some homes, we’d be moving out before I’d even had the chance to put drapes in,” laughs Amy when recalling the heady pace during those years. “That’s what’s so fun about being married to a builder,” she says before adding wryly, “but also what’s a huge pain.” After their fourth project, a ranch in south Texas, Amy declared she was ready to wind down. Deane, however, was not, so he made one last request: **“Let’s just do this one more time.”**

PREVIOUS SPREAD

The Tarrytown lot features an array of mostly native plants that Deane insisted on adding to the property.

RIGHT
Rough, wooden beams and flooring salvaged from decommissioned barns are common throughout the house.





OPPOSITE PAGE
The Deanes can watch television and be cooled by a Big Ass Fan on the patio, which is accessed through 11-foot-tall custom glass doors.

ABOVE
Stanley stretched the Deanes out of their comfort zone and used cozy elements, such as slipcovered sofas, to bring warmth to the space.

Amy agreed, but on two conditions. The next house had to be in Tarrytown, within walking distance of the school attended by their three children (who are now 9, 7 and 6 years old) and located on a cul-de-sac so the kids could play safely in the street. Within 12 hours, Michael had found a one-acre, tree-covered property. For Amy, the lot was love at first sight. "I could see the kids getting lost in the woods, playing forts," she says. "It was so magical. So, I said to Michael, 'If we can get this, then we'll do it one last time.'"

The property, in reality, wasn't exactly fit for living, with its raccoon-infested house destined to be demolished and garden suffocated by invasive species. Still, the couple purchased it in 2008, but decided to sit tight after the global financial crisis hit. While waiting for the economy to recover, Deane, an avid lover of native landscapes, began clearing out the weeds only to uncover magnificent oak trees and postcard-perfect views of the Westlake hills. It wasn't long before he, too, was in love with the property and ready to build.

For this, Deane enlisted his A-team, consisting of Ryan Street (Ryan Street & Associates) on architectural design and Rick Scheen (Land-West Design Group) on landscape. The three have collaborated on more than a dozen projects, including four personal homes for Deane. "They are like a well-oiled machine," Amy says. Or, as Street says, "We've worked together for so many years that a lot goes unspoken."

One unspoken assumption was that any construction would be deferential to the natural landscape. For this project, however, that was easier said than done. "It was like everything fought back," recalls Street of the site's challenges, which involved trees dotted across the property, a 40-foot slope from front to back, a natural orientation facing west into the setting sun and the best views to the north.

Sometimes the biggest challenges create the best results. "It took many more meetings than usual, but we ended up with something very specific to the site and very personal to them," Street says.



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT
From the backyard, guests can venture down to an almost secret quarter-acre meadow alive with prairie grasses and native wildflowers. The stairwell and master bathroom exhibit a modern aesthetic, while the master bedroom and dining room have more of a Hill Country look.

The two-story house has the basic proportions of a simple Texas ranch but is filled with materials employed in fascinating ways: rough, wooden beams and flooring salvaged from decommissioned barns appear next to creamy, polished marble, for example. “It was finding the energy that comes from those combinations,” Street says.

Sometimes the biggest challenges create the best results. “It took many more meetings than usual, but we ended up with something very specific to the site and very personal to them,” Street says. The five-bedroom house is laid out with the open kitchen, dining room and master suite situated along the north side where the pretty hills can be seen through floor-to-ceiling windows. Like the 11-foot-tall, custom-built main doors leading out to the patio, the windows are designed to erase the boundaries between inside and out. This notion is delightfully manifested in the master bathroom, where a 9-foot-tall glass door in the shower opens directly into a private corner of the garden. “It feels just like an outdoor shower, but it’s so much more convenient,” says Deane.

In the design, Street says he was aiming to generate “a feeling or vibe, one that’s humble and clean yet sophisticated at the same time.” The two-story house (plus basement) has the basic proportions of a simple Texas ranch but is filled with materials employed in fascinating ways: rough, wooden beams and flooring salvaged from decommissioned barns appear next to creamy, polished marble in the dining room, for example. “It was finding the energy that comes from those combinations,” Street says.

To help with paint and drape selections, the couple called on interior designer Elizabeth Stanley (Elizabeth Stanley Design), whose contemporary style, Amy says, “stretched us out of our comfort zone.”

To ensure the house felt warm, Stanley used cozy elements, like slipcovered sofas and burlap curtains, but added bursts of energy via modern pieces such as a cylindrical plant pot fashioned out of a pipe from an oil rig. Many of the furnishings are bespoke, having been designed by Deane and Amy with help from the

team (“I call Ryan, Elizabeth and Rick our marriage counselors,” Amy jokes) and made by Austin artists.

If the interiors are a showcase of local talent, then the garden is a brazen celebration of it. Here Scheen has curated a dizzying array of mostly native plants to form a magical landscape where thick-tongued agaves emerge from a carpet of blackfoot daisies, or velvety Silver Pony-foot laps up against prickly cacti and spills over organic limestone ledges. “I’m usually trying to talk clients out of removing plants on the property, but Michael kept saying, ‘Lets add more,’” recalls Scheen.

To compensate for the steep grade change, Scheen crafted several distinct zones, among them a front garden with alfresco dining table, a pool and a grassy lawn where the children can play. The transition between each area is softened by gentle terracing, gravel paths and a sprinkling of steps, giving visitors the feeling of meandering through nature. Those who reach the end of the main garden are treated to the property’s most delightful secret: a quarter-acre meadow spread beneath them, alive with prairie grasses, native wildflowers and a flock of young chickens.

It’s no surprise that, of all his work, this house holds a special place in Deane’s heart. “We feel like we have a little piece of the Hill Country right in the middle of Austin,” he says contentedly. “We’re staying here at least until the kids go to college.” To which Amy replies: “That, I want in writing.” ▲

