

HILLTOP HIDEAWAY

SLOPING LAND AND A SPRING-FED CREEK ARE THE BACKDROP FOR THIS HOME OUTSIDE OF HOUSTON IMBUED WITH THOUGHTFUL, COZY FURNISHINGS AND A MIX OF REGAL ANTIQUES.

WRITTEN BY KIMBERLY OLSON PHOTOGRAPHY BY NICK JOHNSON

INTERIOR DESIGN Ginger Barber, ASID, Ginger Barber Design Inc.
ARCHITECTURE Russell Windham, Curtis & Windham Architects Inc.
HOME BUILDER Brad Ratcliff and Randal B. Ratcliff, R.B. Ratcliff & Associates
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE Sarah Newbery, Curtis & Windham Architects Inc.
BEDROOMS 9 | **BATHROOMS** 11 | **SQUARE FEET** 16,300





Seeking a country getaway near Houston, a couple found not a house, but rather an idyllic spot on which to build one—more than 100 acres with mature trees and rolling green hills, just an hour-and-a-half drive from home. “It almost looks like the nearby areas of Brenham and Chappell Hill, which are charming little towns,” the wife says. “We fell in love with the property.” So build they would.

“They wanted a country house that was like an English hunt cottage,” says Ginger Barber, the couple’s longtime interior designer. While living in London, they’d become enchanted with the countryside. They envisioned relaxing with friends and family, including their two grown daughters, and spending time with their teenage son hiking the property.

Their longtime architects, Russell Windham and William Curtis, and landscape designer Sarah Newbery took their cues from the land. “It’s a remarkable property because there’s a spring-fed creek that runs through the middle of it, and there’s a pretty dramatic slope to the land,” says Windham, who accomplished the project with Hill Swift, Brian Davis and Joel Lowery. “We put the house up on the high side, so you look down on a lake that was made by incorporating the creek, and the owners have a big view of the valley beyond.” Adds Newbery, “What’s beautiful is that you



An elegant fireplace with a mantel by builder Brad Ratcliff offers a cozy dining experience in the great room. The custom table and chairs are by Neal & Company. Left: Bookshelves crafted by the builder display the homeowners' extensive collection. The late 18th-century library staircase was purchased at Memorial Antiques & Interiors.





Interior designer Ginger Barber created a homey great room sitting area with a tufted 19th-century Italian Regency canapé. *Opposite:* A sinuous spiral staircase graces the entry. The antique chair upholstered in vintage linen is from *The Gray Door*, while the antique iron table beside it was purchased at M. Naevé.



The sunny butler's pantry includes a wet bar with plenty of storage. A pair of antique chairs from Memorial Antiques & Interiors flanks a late 19th-century European table purchased at Skelton St. John. Lanterns from Chateau Domingue hang overhead.



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have the near ground of the sloping lawn, a middle ground with a lake that we made, and a long view with layers to it—you see hills and hills.” The couple enjoys an almost cinematic experience as they drive up to the home, which flirts through the trees and then disappears. “At first, you’re meandering through what had been a horse farm,” Newbery says. “The house reveals itself through portions of the landscape.”

In designing the home, the architects created a mixture of intimate rooms—for working or settling in with a good book—to grand, light-filled spaces for big gatherings. “My husband comes from a large family, and this Thanksgiving, we were overflowing in the main house and the guest house,” the wife says. To make the grand rooms appear even larger, they’re preceded by smaller spaces. “When you enter the house, you come through a small entryway and then come into the main room that has a 15-foot-high ceiling. It’s almost a neoclassical English sitting room,” Windham says. “You don’t expect it to have this moment of grandeur, and then to the right, there’s an office sitting room for the master suite that’s very intimate.”

A generous island allows for either prep work or casual dining in the kitchen. Custom-painted barstools from Kirby & Company with nailhead trim detailing provide stylish and comfortable seating. Grosvenor three-light pendants from Circa Lighting offer focused illumination.



Above: The screened porch was designed to act as an outdoor living room. Visitors can grab a spot on the daybed sofa or lounge chairs by The Wicker Works purchased at David Sutherland. Right: The home's stately exterior was constructed from limestone that was whitewashed to give it the appearance of a traditional farmhouse.

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When furnishing the rooms, Barber kept scale at the forefront of her mind. "That main room is huge, and we just went for it," she says. "We over-scaled everything." She used an eclectic mix of antiques—from Swedish to Italian—throughout the home. The wife joined Barber on shopping trips, explaining that she feels more attached to her home if she can remember where every piece came from. Several family heirloom pieces were also incorporated. "There's a desk in one of the upstairs bedrooms that belonged to my great-grandfather," says the wife. "And we have a tiny rocking chair that was my husband's when he was a child. It looks like it was made out of the side of a barrel, and we had it refinished."





This outdoor seating area features a walk-through covered structure by firm Curtis & Windham Architects. The table and chairs are from Brown, and a stone cow garden sculpture from The Mews I adds a whimsical touch.



In the master bathroom, a graceful stand-alone tub affords views of the home's idyllic grounds. An antique beaded chandelier, purchased at W. Gardner, lends old-world elegance while a muslin-upholstered antique side chair, from Memorial Antiques & Interiors, is a resting spot for fluffy towels.



Above: The peaceful master bedroom features a custom bed by David Iatesta purchased at Culp Associates. A French Os de Mouton-style bench is from Liz Spradling Antiques. *Left:* In a quiet corner of the master, a linen slipcovered chaise from The Gray Door provides an ideal lounging spot.

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At the same time, comfort was key. "Every sofa in the house is 96 inches long, because everything had to be nap-able," Barber says. She kept the furnishings as spare as possible, so as not to compete with the home's well-crafted wainscoting and other millwork. Brad Ratcliff, whose team built the home to sky-high standards that will ensure it's still standing in 100 years, also crafted the cabinetry and decorative woodwork. "We have our own 16,000-square-foot mill shop," says Ratcliff, who worked on the build with his father Randal B. Ratcliff. "Curtis & Windham Architects designed every bit of it, and then we built what they drew."

Throughout the design and build, the homeowners were involved every step of the way. "We all hashed out the details together," the wife says. "And we're all friends, so it was a really enjoyable project." **L**