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FEATURE: A Modern Upper Kirby Home Provides an Eye-catching Endcap
to an Architect's Dream Block



ABOVE: John and Laurie Lowery's striking modern home designed by architect Scott Ballard. OPPOSITE: The roof's unique angles top off the 20-plus-foot ceilings of the living room, where geometric light fixtures from Lighting Inc. provide a glowing focal point from inside and outside the home.

Friends & Neighbors

Story By **SANDRA COOK**

Laurie and John Lowery moved into the Audubon Place neighborhood several years ago from the Clear Lake area. Back then they moved into to a smallish house designed by local architect and architecture professor Geoff Brune. The home was interesting, but per the previous owner's specifications, did not have much space for dining or entertaining, so the house eventually felt restricted when family and friends were over.

Laurie and John had thought about adding onto the house, but later spotted a corner lot that was for sale. The lot was slightly larger than most in the neighborhood at 50'x125' and was sitting vacant after the previous home had been removed. Laurie and John knew architect Scott Ballard quite well from the Audubon Place neighborhood, so they

An inviting Modern family home provides an eye-catching endcap to an architect's dream block

Photos by **MIRO DVORSCAK**

approached him about designing a house for the lot.

You see, Scott Ballard is a popular guy on a certain block of Colquitt Street in Audubon Place. He has designed six homes on that block. "It's amazing how good the people on this street have been to me," says Ballard. (See sidebar p. 74.)

"He's our neighbor—there's really a big plus to that," says Laurie. "For all of our meetings, I just walked down the street. We really had fun in the process of designing the house—we did, especially with creating the floor plans."

An architect's ability to listen to a client's needs and translate them into a design that works and fulfills the dreams of the client ultimately





ABOVE: Laurie chose square shapes in solid colors for the living room furniture, include a pair of solid white Knoll chairs, a pair of bright orange ottomans. OPPOSITE: Much of the exterior is covered with Hardie Panels cut into rectangular sections and attached with stainless screws. Inspired by the former Catalan restaurant on Washington Avenue, the bricks are actually clay tiles applied over stucco, so they are less bulky than brick, but equally warm and appealing.

defines the architect's career. "I'm always trying to do a different house every time, so I'm not trying to push a style on somebody," says Ballard. "The client's input is what makes it different each time."

"I think that would be the challenge in designing a house for someone, since everyone has their own ideas and for the architect to be able to marry that input to solid design ideas," says Laurie.

Ballard agrees. "True. You know you want to do a good job, but you don't want to be embarrassed by it," says Ballard with a grin.

Neighborhood Exchange

The design process for the Lowerys home began during 2008 and construction started in January 2009. The Lowerys moved in the spring of 2010. Laurie and John approached Ballard with several design goals in mind. They wanted an open floor plan with lots of natural light. They also wanted space for entertaining, as well as ample storage. The entire family wanted a backyard pool and John, who runs a PR/Marketing firm by day, wanted his own studio space for his painting.

"Scott had great ideas for the space and layout," says Laurie. "We had some concerns with it being on the corner and the light, knowing we wanted a very efficient house. With a corner lot one of the first things you think about is to face the house away from street, but here that was west, towards the sun."

"We ended up with the perfect marriage of everything that we wanted," Laurie continues. "The house faces away from the street, but doesn't feel closed off and doesn't have overexposure to west sun. We have adequate storage, the space for John to paint and just a great entertaining space. It's extremely easy to maintain and fun to have people over. Honestly, I could not be happier with how the house functions. I think that's what Scott does very well is solve problems."

"Most of the stuff I do is on these smaller, Montrose-type lots that are 50 x 100 feet, this one happens to be 50 x 125 feet," says Ballard. "Trying to do the most with the least amount of space keeps the plan efficient, keeps the cost down. We did a lot for the amount of space that we had."

"People comment all the time that the house is a nice size," says





A contemporary light fixture hangs above the sturdy De La Espada table, found at Kuhl Linscomb. A small bar, located between the dining room and the kitchen, helps ease the flow for parties and gatherings.

Laurie. “And the spaces are well-proportioned—that gives it a nice feel and adds to the warmth.”

The main house is about 3,000 square feet, while the separate studio space is around 800 square feet. Since the home has three levels, Ballard lined up closets on all three floors to accommodate an elevator if ever needed in the future.

In the nice open space under the stairs, built-in cabinets and desk space provide a fun work area, shared by Laurie and 12-year-old daughter, Charlotte. Laurie, who works part-time as event coordinator for a non-profit organization, adores the spectrum of aqua blues, turquoise, blue-greens and such. And daughter Charlotte agrees.

“There was some point during the process when I started out selecting all the colors and at first I was choosing a lot of mild colors,” says Laurie. “I was so careful with everything, but then I suddenly

realized I’m not building this house to sell it, I’m building it to live in it! So then I went in different directions and we got all these crazy colors and started really having some fun. And I haven’t regretted any of that.”

Open Minded

“It’s important to have some open space, so I always try to put a big volume into a house,” says Ballard. The living room features fabulous 20-foot ceilings accented by the angles of the roofline and staircase, which is painted dark grey to contrast against the white walls. The inviting room is furnished with a mix of simple shapes, solid colors playful prints. Boxy, solid pieces are punched up with just enough graphic prints to liven up the space without overwhelming the eye.

“I like neutral spaces with punches of color,” says Laurie. “And I



Laurie designed the kitchen with the help of Gabriel Home Builders and their creative team of contractors. The custom walnut cabinetry adds homey warmth to the kitchen, while Benjamin Moore Luau Green on the island adds a festive punch to the entire space. Laurie chose CaesarStone for the countertops.

like to play on different eras.”

“This is definitely one of those houses where the owner has improved upon my work and really made it better,” says Ballard. “I love seeing the light fixtures from the street.”

Outside: the Lines

“I’ve been going through a period of using inverted roofs,” says Ballard. “So instead of the standard old gable, I’ve been turning things inward these days and figuring out a way for it to drain.”

For this house Ballard used double roof slopes, so rainwater drains in two places (front and back of the house), providing an exciting ride for the rainwater.

Laurie’s request for a banquette breakfast nook in the kitchen

resulted in the interesting 45-degree angled section on the exterior gives a nice accent to the home’s south wall. On the second floor the angled section accommodates Charlotte’s bathroom vanity area. Speaking of fun angles, the walls on the sides of the house tilt outward as they go up, so the ground floor takes up less of the yard, while the second floor has more generous space thanks to the slant of the exterior walls.

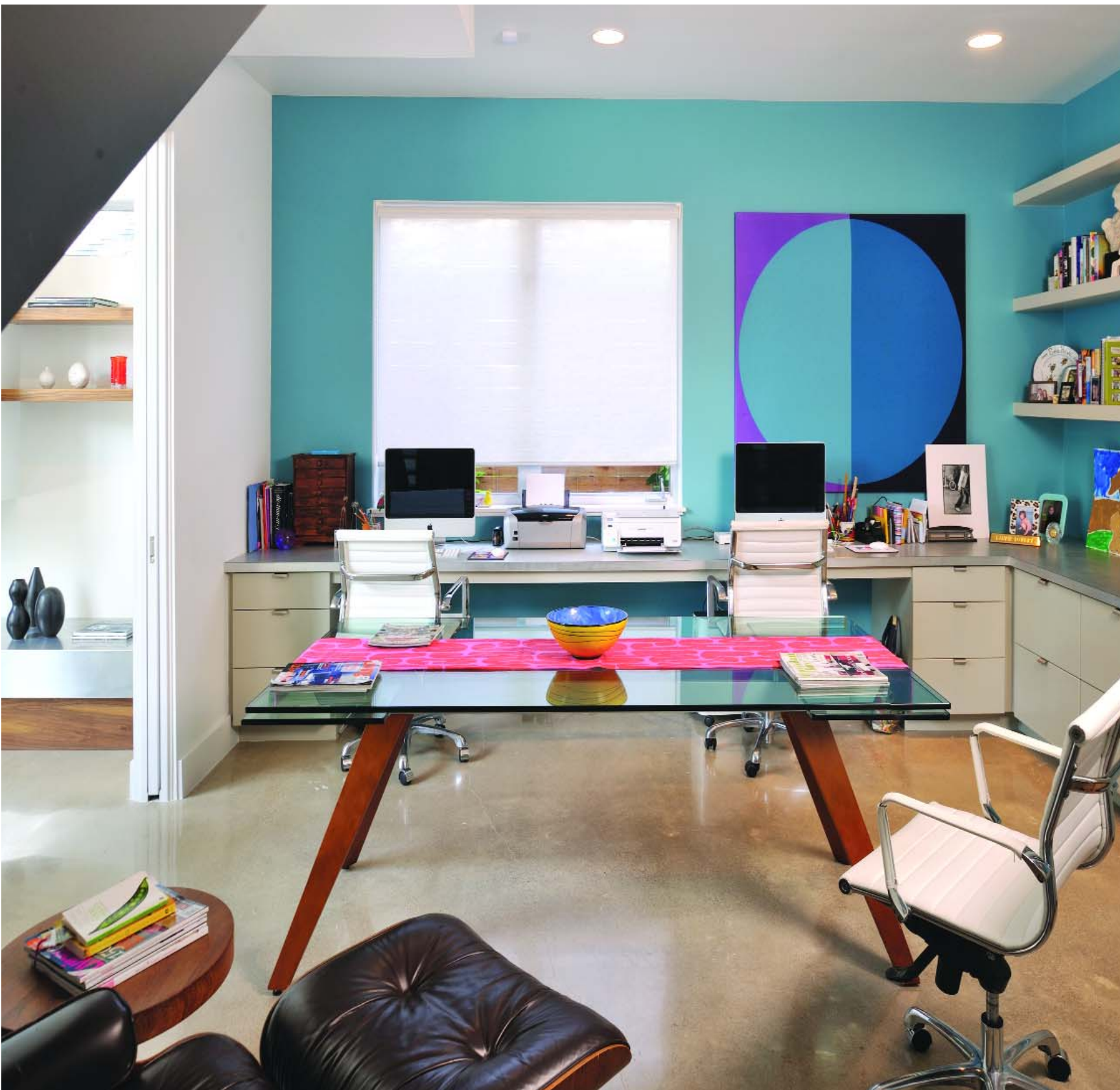
“It’s great to do this type of project so close to home, because the framing process takes a lot of input from the architect,” says Ballard. “If you can get a big volume with enough glass that doesn’t face the west sun you can achieve a successful design.”

“There’s nothing I would have done differently,” says Laurie.



ABOVE: Grey-tones and neutrals provide a soothing palette for the master bedroom. The tangerine-colored lampshade and rug reflect Laurie's penchant for the occasional burst of color. BELOW: John's painting studio functions as a man cave, and is an ideal haven for his late-night painting habit. The walls are outfitted with reclaimed wood and nostalgic signs for an icehouse feel.





Laurie and daughter Charlotte share the airy office space below the stairs, where the walls are painted Sherwin Williams Lakeshore. The wall hanging is vintage Marimekko fabric stretched on a frame.





Upstairs, a basic pine tongue-and-groove 2x6" subfloor was stained and finished off for durability. The sturdy, wide planks warm the space, and fit nicely with the proportions of the house. Laurie bought the Spa Orangina print at a vintage poster gallery in New Orleans.



From the third floor perch, the Lowerys enjoy views of rooftops and treetops of the Audubon Place neighborhood.





Building Blocks of Contemporary Architecture

Over his 40-year career in architecture, Houston architect Scott Ballard has designed dramatic and engaging structures, large and small. His large-scale projects range from hospitals and university buildings, to hotels across the globe and the 45-story Putra World Trade Center in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Designing hotels and office towers may sound exciting, but Ballard much prefers to design unique homes for individual clients, which is why he has focused on residential design for the past two decades.

Designing homes for clients energizes the architect and sets his wheels in motion. Assembling a home, to Ballard, is a quest in creative problem solving. In fact, assembling is exactly right. Ballard begins each design with three-dimensional models, often producing two or three concepts for each client before any floor plans or drawings are put on paper.

Ballard's approach has clearly been a hit on his own block of Colquitt St., just west of Greenbriar. Since designing and building his own home there, Ballard has been asked to design contemporary homes for five other property owners on the street. James Thomas, FAIA, an architect and professor at the University of Houston Gerald Hines School of Architecture, lives in one of the original 1930s homes on the street. Thomas often refers to the block as "Ballard's Alley" and guides his architectural students on tours of the block each year.

"So far, I have done six houses on the block," says Ballard. "Other folks have bought lots on our unique block and used their own architects, which complement my collection of contemporary houses. Of 24 houses on the block, eleven are newly designed by architects, and most are commendable examples of good contemporary design."

Ballard says he would love to design new homes for the rest of the block, and actually offers discounted fees to neighbors. One more home project has been discussed, but is not underway just yet, although he is currently designing a bay house for a neighbor.

"We have a very tight neighborhood group and I think most people feel a sense of belonging and community—maybe even part of something cool," says Ballard. "We get a parade of slow moving cars on the weekends, so perhaps interesting houses are better than a speed bump."

Ballard's office is on the ground floor of his own home, so when he meets with prospective clients, he can walk them up the street and show the interior of any of the houses they want to see. "All my clients have been very supportive of my little architectural practice and do not hesitate to recommend me (at least when I am standing there)," says Ballard with a laugh. "Also, I think the great diversity of style shows prospective clients that I design for specific clients and do not try to fit all my clients into the same stylistic box."



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