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New Bungalow

Welcomes In Comfortable Urban Living BY SUSAN FOX

When you have a winner, as do Paula Johnson and Laura Menefree — owners of a thoughtfully constructed new Houston Heights bungalow — it becomes evident that having the right team in place is paramount.

Menefree says their first team pick was the architect. Antonio Flamenco at INsite Architecture designed their second home on Lake Conroe seven years ago. Crediting him with knowing what they liked and how to make their city home “different,” they were not disappointed with his presentation.

INsite also understood the sensitivities and restrictions of the designated historical district where Menefree and Johnson planned to build. The firm’s understanding of how to build new in an older neighborhood proved important, since the Houston Archeological and Historical Commission had to approve the plans before construction could begin.

The plans then were submitted to three builders for bids. Gabriel Home Builders won their confidence. Menefree and Johnson liked that the company had previously built in the Heights, and they felt comfortable knowing the builders have their office in the neighborhood.

The interior departs from the traditional bungalow floor-plan. Its openness suits the homeowners’ active lifestyle -- entertaining friends and family. Interior Designer Laura Umansky set out to furnish the home comfortably and for easy living.





Quincy, a long-haired dachshund, perches on the sofa top, ready to mingle and party with guests. The upholstered console with decorative nailhead and complementary cube seating provides an area from which to serve. The moveable cubes also can be taken elsewhere in the room – or wherever guests want to sit.

“In a custom build situation, clear communication about the budget and transparency on the costs during the building process is critical,” says Menefree. “You’ve got to have a team you can trust implicitly.”

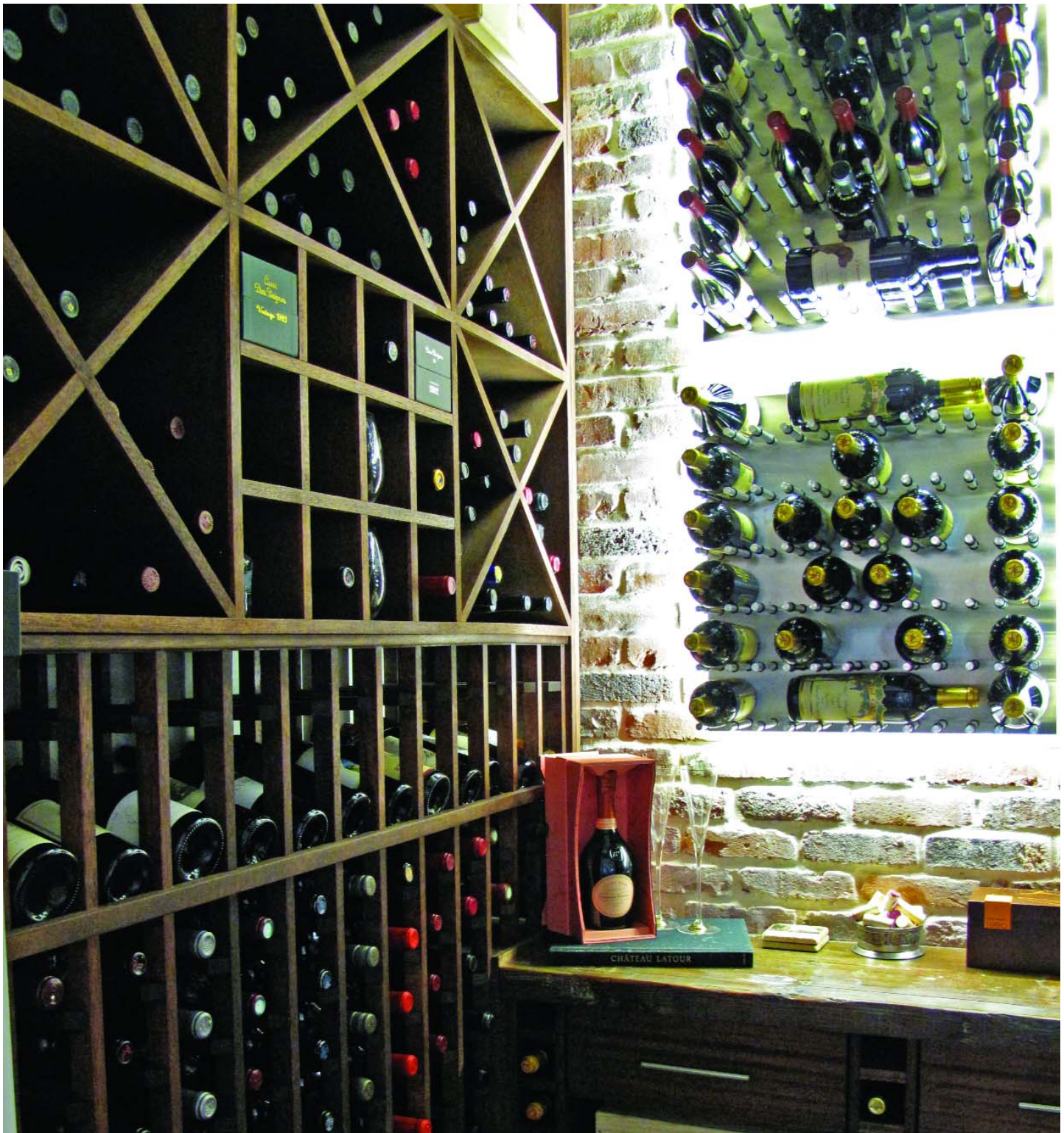
The final member of their team — referred to them by Jeannine Nuzzi, owner of Gabriel Home Builders — was Laura Umansky,



According to Interior Designer Laura Umansky, the homeowners wanted a comfortable and intimate dining area -- where guests could linger for as long as they liked. The table is custom. The light fixture is from Design Within Reach, and Beacon Hill fabrics with a leather front were chosen for the high-back chairs.

principal of the Laura U Design Studio. “Jeannine gave us several names, and we interviewed all of them. We knew Laura would be the one to exceed our expectations,” says Menefree.

According to Umansky, the directive from Menefree and Johnson was straightforward. They wanted a “soft contemporary urban home.” They asked the designers to focus special attention



The custom wine room is a strong visual point in the dining room. Additionally, the owners and guests can walk into the space. A free-standing console was added to provide a work and resting area.

on creating a home that catered to entertaining.

While the house appears large from the curbside, it feels cozier when visitors walk immediately into a large open horizontal space that combines the kitchen and living room. Glass, wood-framed doors in the living room open to a large outdoor covered deck.

On nice-weather days, the living area actually becomes larger



Reclaimed wood constitutes the counter top; it was an item suggested and found by their builder, Jeannine Nuzzi at Gabriel Home Builders.

when the outdoors is allowed “inside.” And even when the doors are closed, the backyard vista is soothing and promotes a more open feel.

The home is actually 2,800 square feet, all total. The owners did not want a home that felt too large, and one where rooms remained unused.





The upstairs landing was also designed for comfort. The seagrass rug lends a little bit of texture to the creamy sleeker look of the furnishings. *(photo courtesy of The Laura U Design Studio)*

To the left of the entry is a separate dining room that fronts the house and features a glass-front, walk-in wine cellar.

In all the main living areas Umansky and her colleagues focused much attention on creating spaces suited for entertaining.

“Laura and Paula wanted large-scale chairs in comfortable fabrics placed in the dining room so that guests could enjoy a meal and then linger for as long as desired. The living room also was furnished to seat easily six or more guests.

Of course, the bar stools at the kitchen’s eating bar easily turn to be part of the living room congregation.

“We have learned that people always gather in or around the

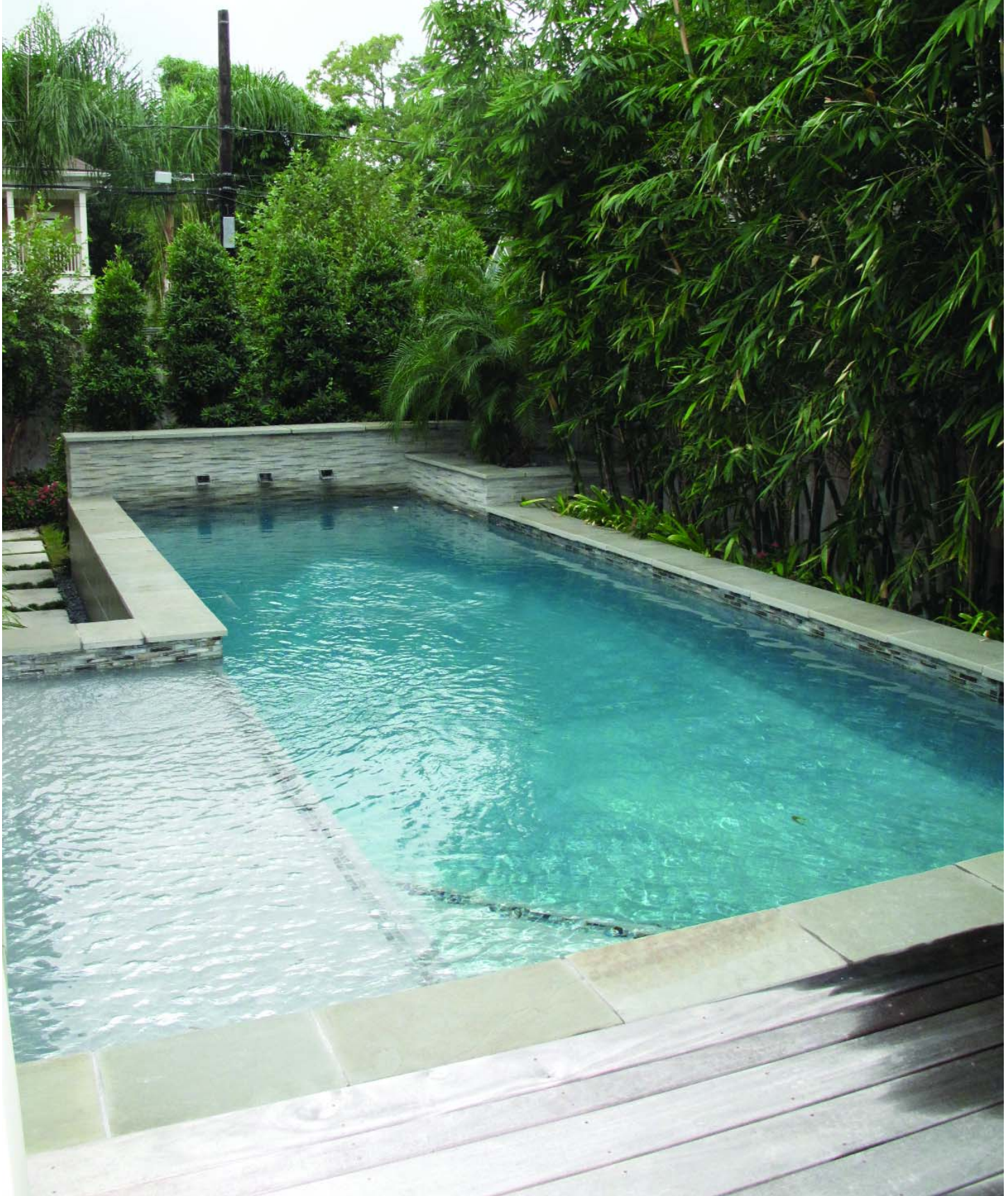




The master, decorated in a transitional style, is layered with visually interesting and textural neutrals. The master bath is to the right side of the room, and an inviting view to the backyard pool lies in direct view of the bed. *(photo courtesy of The Laura U Design Studio)*

kitchen, so it was important to us that the kitchen not be separated from the main living area,” says Menefree.

“At Laura’s suggestions, we initially created an Ideabook on Houzz.com that consisted of many rooms and furniture that we liked. And then we shared it with them,” says Menefree, noting the process provided helpful visual communication. “With very

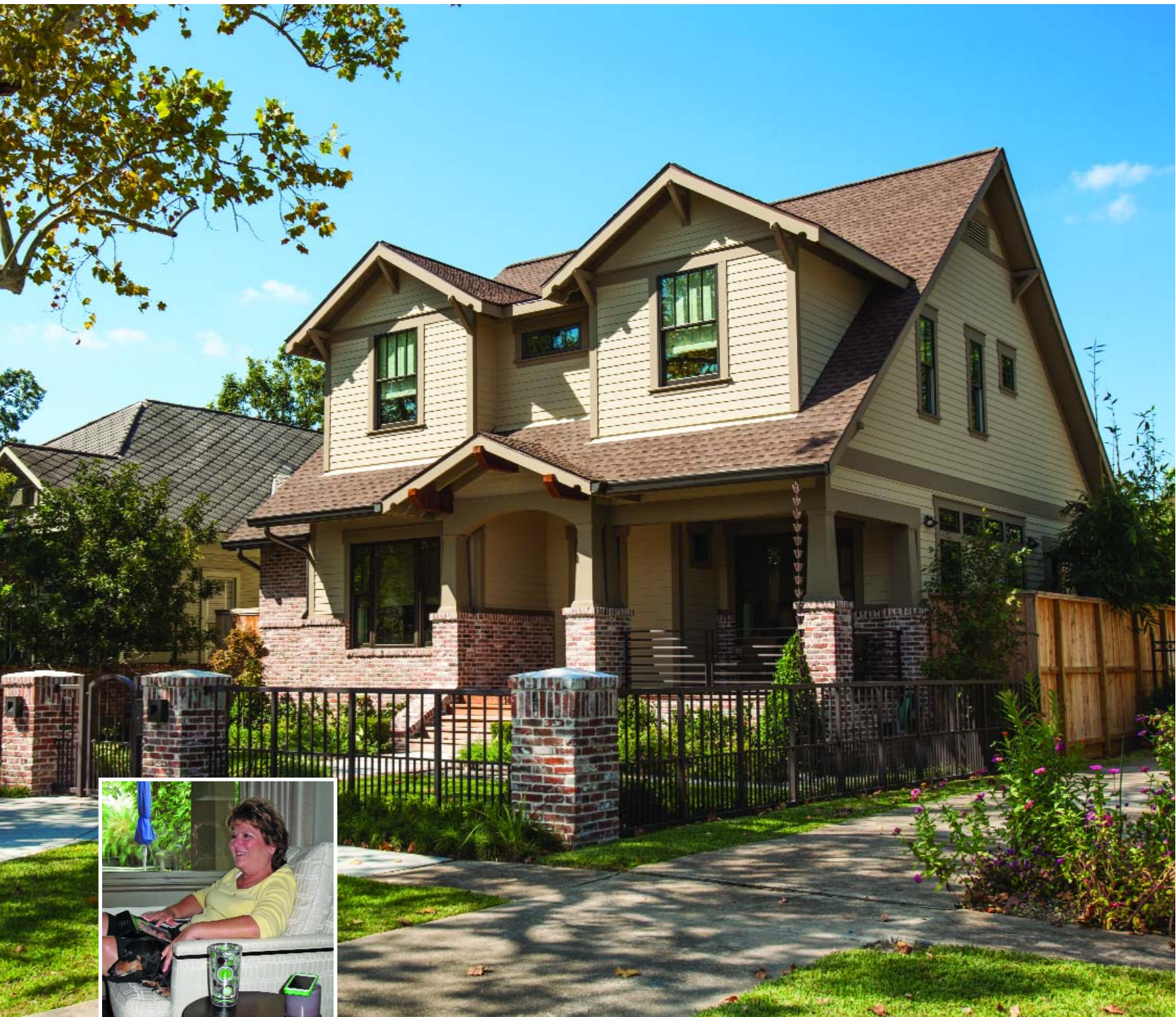


The beautiful swimming pool comprises much of the backyard. A nicely appointed outdoor kitchen and seating is located just in the forefront of the pool -- an area seen from the living area. *(photo courtesy of The Laura U Design Studio)*

few exceptions, we bought all new furnishings.”

“We also learned that it is important to identify those design elements on which you can compromise, and those that will bug you forever if you don’t change them,” says Menefree.





This new construction was built to complement its Houston Heights neighbors. The owners wanted bungalow charm – but with a very livable and sophisticated, light contemporary decor inside. *(photo courtesy of The Laura U Design Studio)*

Laura Menefree and Jack, a short-haired dachshund, relax in a sitting area tucked in the corner of the master bedroom.

Resources

The Laura U Design Studio

www.laurau.com

713-522-0855

INsite Architecture

www.insitearchitecture.net

281-955-5504

Gabriel Home Builders

www.gabrielhomebuilders.com

713-861-8613