

## DESIGN



Jeremiah Dearing

Although the three-bedroom, two-bathroom 1990s house outside Fredericksburg needed updating, Tyler O'Brien was drawn to its great bones and amazing view.

# TAKING THE LONG VIEW

Redoing his hilltop home, builder considered what he likes — and a future buyer would want

By Richard A. Marini  
STAFF WRITER

The house Tyler O'Brien bought about a year and a half ago just south of Fredericksburg was a mess.

Built in 1997, the house had many aspects in desperate need of updating. Instead of a garage there was only a carport. The landscape was overgrown, and the drive leading from the main road to the house was a washed-out dirt road.

But the three-bedroom, two-bathroom house had two things that money can't buy: great bones and a 360-degree hilltop view of the surrounding countryside.

"You can't take a view and move it somewhere else," said O'Brien, owner of Fredericksburg-based Agave Custom Homes. "Everywhere you look there's a view, so I said to myself, I can make this house work."

After eight months and



Billy Calzada/Staff photographer

O'Brien, owner of Agave Custom Homes, made all the design and decorating decisions himself. He added a vaulted ceiling of stained yellow pine and opened up the claustrophobic kitchen.

about \$600,000 in renovation work, the house is now a charming, Hill Country-style home. The house features a large, open living area, a majestic kitchen and plenty of separate spaces, inside and out, where O'Brien, who is 42 and single, can entertain.

Still, while he built it for himself, O'Brien, who moved into the house in February, supervised the redo with an eye toward its possible resale.

"People say you build a home to create memories," he said. "Yes, but in my profession, I also build them to eventually sell and make money."

The home's entryway leads into a living area with a vaulted ceiling of stained yellow pine bisected by a rough-hewn cedar beam that runs the length of the room. That, along with a stone fireplace angled in one corner, are two of only a few of the home's original features O'Brien kept.

*Hilltop home continues on E8*

## HOME LIFE

# 7 design changes ushered in by the pandemic

By Diane Cowen  
STAFF WRITER

When the coronavirus pandemic first shut down schools, offices and events, Houston interior designer Veronica Solomon did what we all did: She stocked up on toilet paper.

She half-jokingly calls herself a "prepper," but at the time, the panic was real, and Solomon, who owns Casa Vilora Interi-

ors, was determined to have a substantial stash. Now, her pantry has special drawers deep enough to hold rolls and rolls of tissue.

Like other designers, she was inundated with client calls about buying desks for working from home, new furniture to replace the stuff clients finally realized was shabby and a host of other things.

"We leaned even more



One of designer Veronica Solomon's clients reinvented their living room, dining room and home office during the pandemic, when surroundings had a major effect on well-being.

Courtesy Veronica Solomon

into the idea of starting with the big picture first. Many clients were willing to invest in their homes in a way they never had before. They weren't traveling any more or eating out, so they were willing to make sure their homes fulfill their needs for them," Solomon said. "Some of these things may seem frivolous — who cares where you store your shoes or handbags? — but I always say

that everyone's luxury is not the same."

In her recent talk during the Houston Design District's Fall Design Week, Solomon zeroed in on seven significant changes at home brought about by the pandemic.

### 1. Storage

Whether people simply needed something to fill their time or were finally getting around to

*Home continues on E2*

**NEW!**  
**Thick 'N Fluffy French Toast**  
Try all three flavors & make every day feel like a holiday.

*New!* STRAWBERRY BANANA  
*New!* LEMON RICOTTA MIXED BERRY  
*New!* GINGERSNAP APPLE

**Spectacular SAVINGS**

**SAVE UP TO \$30 OFF ADMISSION**

Pick up your coupon at participating IHOP locations

For a limited time at participating restaurants. SIX FLAGS® and all related indicia TM; © 2022 Six Flags Theme Parks, Inc. ©2022 IHOP Restaurants LLC



# HILLTOP HOME

From page E1

Among his many additions to the living area are the cabinets with crosshatched doors he built next to the fireplace to make up for a lack of storage and the engineered white oak flooring.

“For a while people were doing 5-inch, even 7-inch planking,” he said. “We went back to the 3-inch. It’s kind of old school, but the thin look is starting to become a trend again.”

Among the things he didn’t like about the home’s ’90s style was how the bedrooms were right off the main living area. He built a pocket door between the living area and hall leading to the guest bedrooms so if someone is sleeping, they won’t be disturbed if the TV in the living room is on.

O’Brien made all the design and decorating decisions himself. His bold tastes are apparent in the colorful, often textured wallpaper used in several of the rooms (and one of the ceilings), the wide trim he added to many of the doorways and windows, even the classic transom window he built above that pocket door.

While he purchased much of the artwork and other décor items specifically for this house, a number of pieces had been used to stage previous homes he’d built.

“A lot of these pieces helped me sell the houses I placed them in,” he said. “But if the new owners don’t want them, I take them.”

O’Brien took design inspiration from the seashore when decorating the owner’s suite, located at the opposite end of the house from the guest bedrooms. The walls are painted a sea foam green, portholes serve as windows and clocks, and one wall is dominated by a large nighttime photograph of the iconic pier in Islamorada in the Florida Keys.

“I love Florida and I’m inspired by the beach; it’s my happy place,” he explained. “I call the look I created ‘Coastal meets Hill Country.’”

He also raised the bedroom’s



The owner’s suite, with seabird artwork and a large nighttime photograph of a Florida Keys pier, was inspired by the beach. Wallpaper adds texture, and the vaulted ceiling echoes the living area.

9-foot ceiling to create a vaulted ceiling that echoes the one in the living room.

The bathroom was reworked. The bathroom floor and shower ceiling are both done in white and gray hexagonal-shaped Carrara marble tile, the cabinet doors are louvered, and the walls behind the built-in shelving are wallpapered.

Adjacent to the living room, what had been a dark, claustrophobic kitchen was opened up and transformed into a handsome, colorful room with a Saltillo tile floor, a beamed ceiling and a long, narrow, white quartz island measuring 7½ feet by about 3½ feet.

“I didn’t have much depth to work with in the kitchen,” he said. “So I decided to make the island longer instead of wider. There’s still room for guests to sit and eat while I cook and prep.”

With plenty of friends and family in the area, O’Brien said he’s already thrown Fourth of July and Labor Day parties, and is now gearing up for the holiday season.

Instead of continuing the quartz to the perimeter, however, he installed walnut count-



The den area off the kitchen reflects how Tyler O’Brien used different colors and textures throughout the home.

ertops.

“I like having a bunch of different textures,” he said. “The walnut warms things up.”

He removed one wall of cabinets opposite the sink, connecting the room to an adjacent den and bar area, and opening up the views out to the back patio.

“If you’re entertaining and you’re in the kitchen, you can still see people sitting in here and here,” he said, gesturing to the den and living rooms. “And you can see out the window to the back porch.”

That’s where you’ll find a full outdoor kitchen; several covered seating areas, one with a TV; a wood-burning firepit; and a built-in swimming pool with a tanning ledge at one end and a hot tub at the other.

Due to supply chain issues that have roiled the construction industry, the renovation took longer than it might have otherwise. Still, O’Brien had one demand he was willing to wait on: He wanted matte white appliances with rose gold hardware from GE’s Cafe line.

“I ordered them in August of 2021, and we didn’t get them until this past September,” he said. “But look of the matte white against the teal cabinets was something I knew I just had to have.”

He also liked matte white because it doesn’t show fingerprints like stainless steel and looks more elegant than the bright white that’s been popular in appliances since the ’90s.

The pantry is nothing less than showplace, with individual, hand-labeled baskets holding crackers, tuna, macaroni and other foodstuffs neatly lined up on shelves alongside small appliances.

“I’m very Type A,” he said with a laugh.

The garage is another showplace; it’s so neat and tidy he even installed a glass door so it’s visible from inside the house.

“I don’t like seeing junk in my garage,” he said. “Even the paint buckets I keep for touch-ups I put in a nice cabinet.”

rmarini@express-news.net | Twitter: @RichardMarini

**SAFE SHOWERS**  
.COM  
Serving Texans Since 1990

\$1,000 OFF

**Before**

**After**

**Same and Next Day Appointments Available**

**Most Jobs Completed in 1 - 2 Days**

**End Of Year Dream Bathroom Sale!**  
**\$1,000 OFF** Installation of a new bath or shower!\*

**Ask about INTREST-FREE Financing!**  
Payments as low as \$99/month.\*\*

Senior, Military & First Responders Discounts.

Get your new Walk-In Shower Installed before Christmas

**210-985-8056**  
WWW.SAFESHOWERS.COM  
SHOWROOM: 11914 RADIUM ST, SAN ANTONIO, TX - 78216  
NO GROUT - LICENSED PLUMBER ON EVERY JOB

ACCREDITED BUSINESS  
BBB Rating: A+

\* New orders only. Cannot be combined with any other offer. Does not include materials or other business costs. Other restrictions may apply.  
\*\* With Minimum purchase Made at initial appointment and approved credit. Other restrictions may apply.  
Expiration Date: 11/30/22