



A LOVELY LIFESTYLE

Text by Cathy Gordon | Photos by Miro Dvorscak



A Houston couple embraces fresh, low-maintenance living in this three-story charmer

Paul and Genelle Robishaw fondly recall the many years spent in their Briargrove Park home in Houston. Lots of love and memories went into that house, purchased in 1973. They raised their children there and renovated it more than once, gutting the story-and-a-half for a complete remodel.

But when the time came to again contemplate updates, the cost-analysis wasn't on their side. "It wasn't worth putting more money into that house," explains Paul. "Also the neighborhood demographics had changed and we had moved up in age compared to neighbors. And we didn't want to do the outside yard work anymore. Staying there just didn't make sense."

The Robishaws love to travel, and they spend summers at their property in Wyoming. So a lock-and-leave, new construction, low-maintenance home in a gated community made the most sense. Their daughter had proposed that option. The idea was taking hold.

They consulted with their neighbor, a realtor, and quickly narrowed prospects to a six-unit gated community of urban luxury homes by Carmel, a division of McGuyer Homebuilders, Inc.





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PREVIOUS PAGES: A warm mix of furniture from Baker and Beacon Hill offer class and comfort. The living room is the heart of this home with French doors leading to a courtyard. A gently curving staircase leads to the second and third level. | A welcoming foyer sets the tone for what awaits visitors in this comfortable, elegant home. | Paintings by artist Sarah Lamb add a punch of color on smooth American Clay Venetian plaster walls in the breakfast room. (Matt Coulson of JM Coulson Enterprises, Inc.) THESE PAGES: The powder room is quaint in warm tones. | A beautiful dining table anchors this dining room, enveloped in American Clay soft earthy plaster walls. A contrasting paint color on the ceiling adds a touch of drama. | Contrast is key in this kitchen where rich, dark cabinetry mingles with smooth American Clay Venetian plaster walls and travertine. Granite countertops and Wolf appliances top off this attractive space.

Fast-forward a few years and the couple is now happily at home in their new abode with two pampered Boston terriers, Muggs and Mollie.

"We just love it," says Genelle of the home that is close to shopping, great restaurants and access routes so crucial to urban living. At the same time, the dwelling has the ambience of a private retreat.

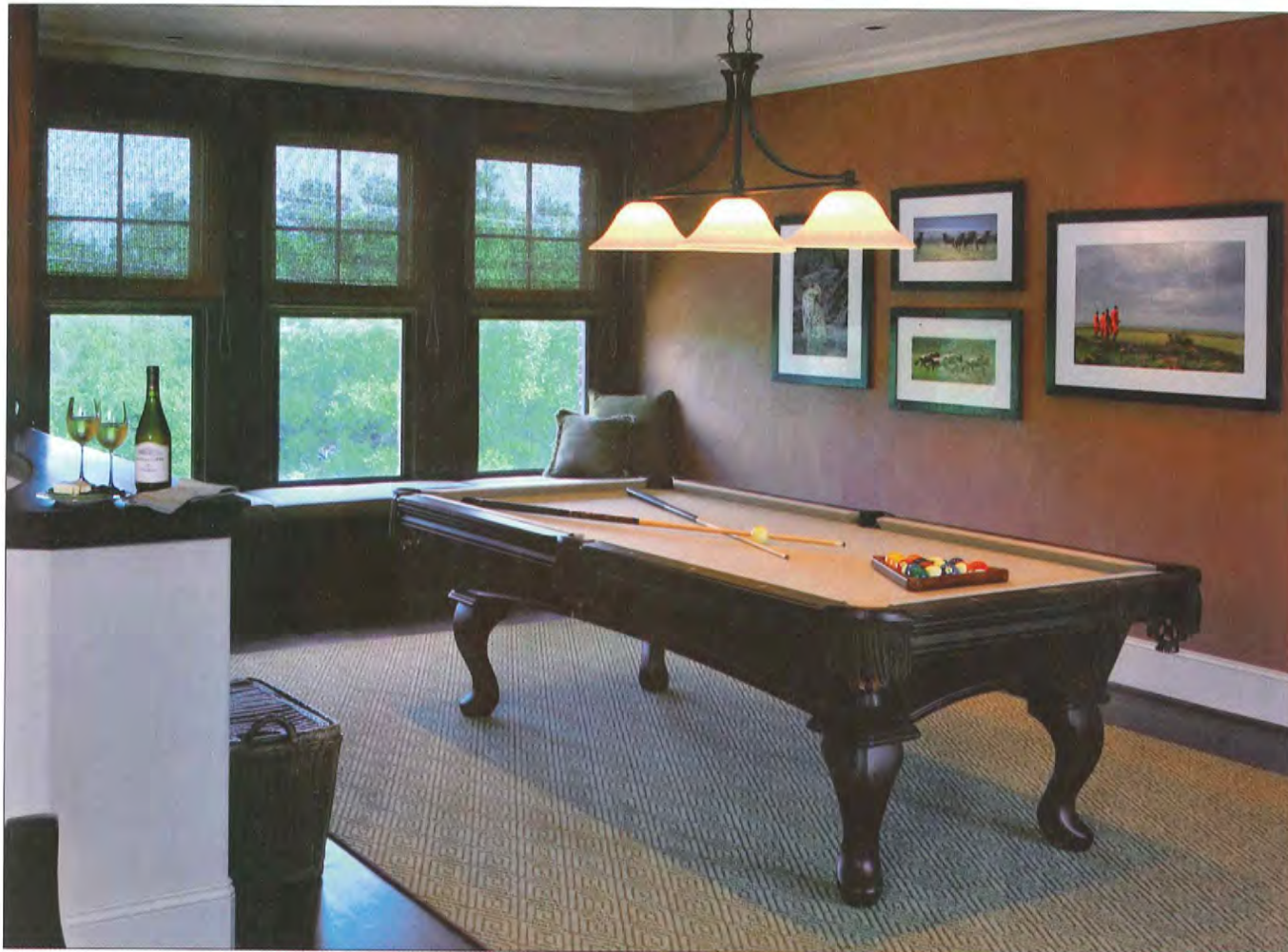
Luckily, the couple found the home in the framing stage, allowing them to custom design the spaces and interior details. This meant a telephone call to designer Cynthia A. Higgins (CAH Interiors) who had worked with the couple on their previous home as well as Paul's office. "She's the first person we called when we decided on this place," recalls Paul, now retired. "She knows our tastes, so we could just turn her loose. There's a trust there."

"It's an easy working relationship," agrees Higgins. "They have wonderful taste. It was a really organized venture between everyone involved."

The couple had definite ideas that required tweaking the home plan here and there. "We can't say enough good things about Carmel Builders and how they went out of their way to work with us in what was their first venture into this higher end market," Paul explains. "They appreciated feedback from us about what a buyer in this market would be looking for and it was quite the learning curve for both of us."

The result is a 5,400-square-foot, three-story floorplan that utilizes space well. And Higgins' cohesive design plan makes for a dwelling that is serenely elegant, yet comfortable. A palette of neutral colors and textures mix with other soft hues, a perfect backdrop for the Robishaws' art, including custom pieces from Charles





THESE PAGES: The home has plenty of space for overnight guests. Here, one of the guest suites. | An appealing bathroom off of one of the guest suites. | The media room's beauty lies in its simplicity. The faux walls (JM Coulson Enterprises, Inc.) were inspired by a wall covering. Natural tones give the room a tranquil, relaxing vibe. | A pool table in the third story gameroom offers all sorts of fun, but it's the homeowner's amazing artwork on the walls that attracts most of the attention in this space. Paul has made several trips to Africa over the years, capturing wildlife and other offerings of the continent on film.

White, Meredith Long Gallery and Roxanna Hill.

But especially eye-catching are works by the homeowner photographer, Paul, who has traveled to Africa many times to capture its magical wildlife, culture and scenery on film. "It's just something I enjoy doing," he says, modest about it all. The pictures on their walls tell the story of the land, the images made even more spectacular due to fine art 12-volt lighting they had installed throughout. (Illuminations Lighting Design).

"Lighting is everything," says Paul.

Lots of changes went into this home. For one thing, a downstairs space dedicated for a guest bedroom and accompanying full bathroom was modified to accommodate Paul's office, a powder bath and coat closet. "That made better sense for us," says Genelle of the home that includes three guest suites on the upper levels. "Lots of room for the grandkids."

Attention to finishes and details was just as important as making good use of space. There's a seamless, organic feel to the home. Beautiful, smooth plaster walls give an earthy, subtle elegance to the rooms. (Faux product, American Clay plasters, applied by JM Coulson Enterprises, Inc.) A bonus, homeowners say, is the product's ability to "breathe" and release negative ions that keeps rooms smelling fresh.

Visitors here can't help but feel at home. The house has a great flow. Light-filled spaces, balconies galore and more than ample room size make the home perfect for entertaining. Window treatments don't obstruct, but rather usher in the outside.

A stunning downstairs kicks off the tour. A large living room replete with French doors leading to a courtyard adjoins the kitchen and breakfast room. Beautiful furniture by Baker and Beacon Hill fills rooms in varying textures and warm colors. The kitchen has all the bells and whistles with Wolf appliances, granite countertops and handsome dark cabinetry for contrast.

A butler's pantry leads from the kitchen to the dining room, a stunning space cloaked in plaster walls with a contrasting ceiling color. Elegant Robert Allen furniture adds to the drama, along with treasured art pieces.

A small but lovely wine room rounds out the downstairs next to Paul's office. If one is not inclined to take the elevator, a gently curving spiral staircase leads to

the second and third stories.

The library off of the master bedroom is a real eye-catcher. A sweet little Henredon desk is the focal point here, sitting atop a striking graphic carpet and surrounded by soft blue plaster walls. Beautiful ceiling to floor draperies (draperies throughout the house by Phil Staley and Associates) complete the look.

The master bedroom is generous in size and equally lovely with traditional furniture in neutrals. Balcony access is perfect for a morning cup of coffee (a coffee bar is conveniently located on this level) or just sitting with a good book. A large master bathroom, guest suite, laundry room and media room round out the second story.

The media room/theater is beautiful in its simplicity with the faux walls inspired by a wall covering (Matt Coulson, JM Coulson Enterprises, Inc.) and a built-in with shelves and cabinets is distressed to look like a piece of freestanding furniture.





THESE PAGES: Walls in soft blue provide a lovely canvas in the library just off of the master bedroom. The small curvaceous desk by Henredon is a focal piece here. Painting from Fine Arts Warehouse on Fondren. | Beautiful classic tone-on-tone colorings make up the master bedroom.

The third story is yet another example of well-considered space. This level provides full-range fun for guests with a mini kitchen and gameroom with pool table. Two guest suites take up residence here too. Especially striking is a large, 230 million-year-old piece of petrified wood that is anchored to the wall—drilled into the studs—in the mini kitchen. The couple found it at By Nature Gallery in Jackson, Wyo.

"We saw it and knew where it was going to go," says Paul. "They had their own people who work with the museum hang it. It's a great conversation piece."

Paul's photography often sparks conversation too. He and Higgins spent a fair amount of time sorting through hundreds of photographs and picking which ones would grace the walls. Many of them are cleverly arranged in the gameroom.

"It's a little addictive," Paul says of his photography hobby. He and Genelle are planning a trip to Africa soon.

"This house works well for us in so many ways, including when we travel," Paul says. "Best move we ever made." ●