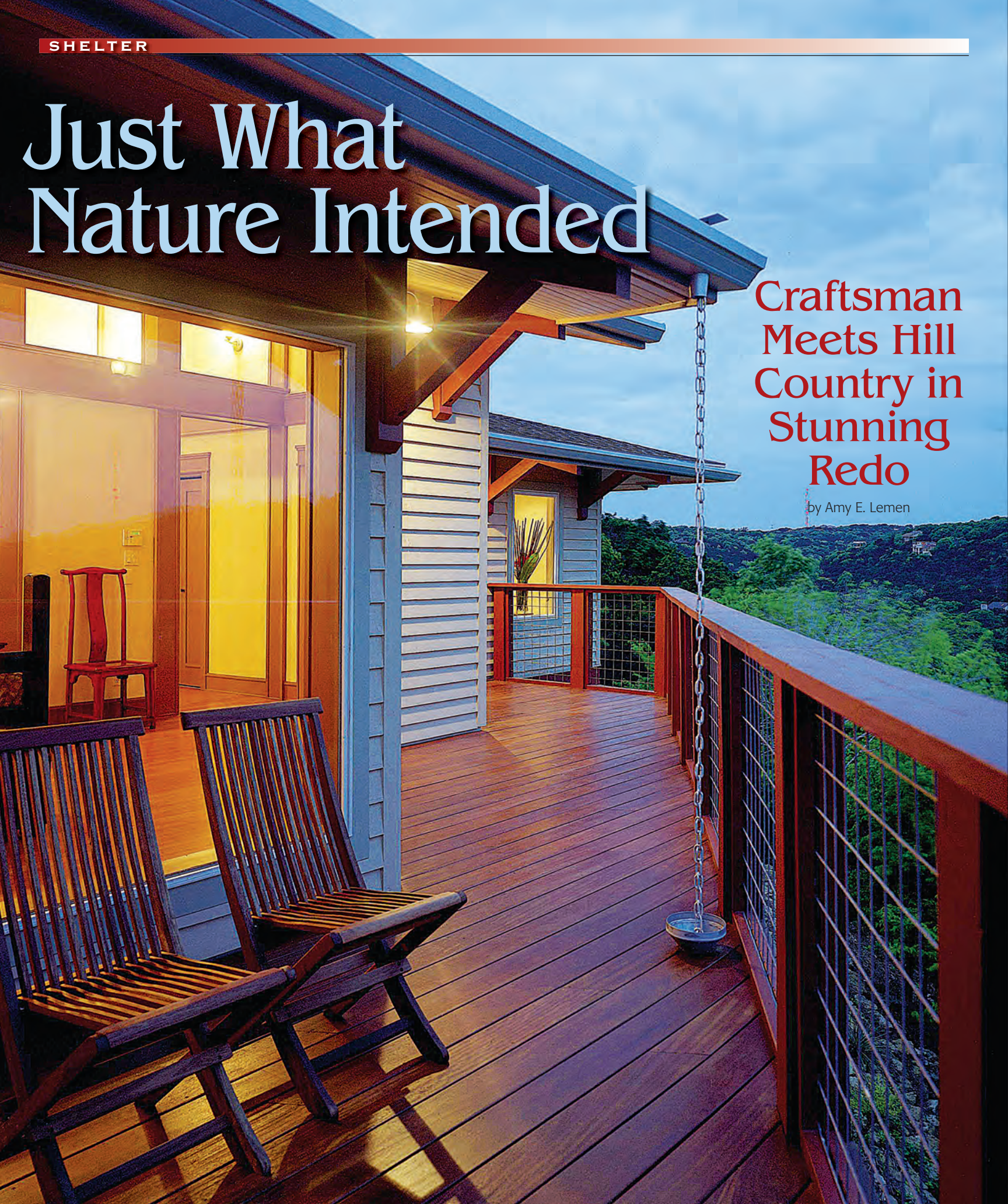


Just What Nature Intended

Craftsman Meets Hill Country in Stunning Redo

by Amy E. Lemen



Trying to preserve style in an age of homogenous sameness is enough of a challenge today, but it was especially so in England in the late eighteenth-hundreds.

At the height of the Industrial Revolution, automation became synonymous with increased success, but that revolutionary change didn't apply to everything—and the Arts and Crafts style was born.

"The Arts and Crafts style had much to do with appreciating the work of artists and craftsmen in an era of industrial revolution," says Steve Wauson, an Austin builder who specializes in the

three-story, mahogany lattice balustrade that was milled and assembled on-site. Measuring more than a hundred fifty feet long, its traditional joinery has two thousand joints. There's also hand-done tilework. Four carpenters with more than a hundred years of combined experience painstakingly completed interior and exterior woodwork.

"I have strong feelings about the craft that goes into the work," says Wauson. "You're not buying expensive parts and putting them into a house, but having craftspeople approach the project more openly—giving them free rein to create as they address each sit-



style. "It also had to do with blending the house into the environment. Now, that dovetails nicely with what we're trying to do with energy efficiency and green building."

The house that Wauson built, nestled in a wooded area of West Lake Hills, epitomizes this style—a built environment that doesn't cut corners, doesn't flinch from perfection and doesn't shrink from the creativity of art for art's sake.

In this house, the art includes a

uation. Instead of them going to a job and being told what to do, they're more emotionally invested in the project, and you get their best work."

Perhaps even more impressive is that the house was in a state of near-total disrepair when Wauson bought it; as a result, it's essentially new construction.

"This was a true adaptive reuse of a twenty-year-old building," says architect Mark Canada, AIA, of Austin-based Canada and Associates Archi-

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ecture. “Now it’s totally transformed into a luxury residence.”

The interior style defines the house, which has four bedrooms and four-and-a-half baths in its five thousand square

yet still bringing the style along.”

For example, the woodwork is stained, not painted, with a lighter color that gives the home a more contemporary feel. The Prairie Craftsman look



feet. A blend of California Craftsman, Prairie Craftsman, and Japanese influences, the home has an open floorplan but defined spaces through the use of beams, columns and unique floor patterns.

“We used the Arts and Crafts style to detail a contemporary layout,” says Wauson. “It’s giving people what they expect,

is echoed in the home’s strong, horizontal lines—scaled but comfortable. The California influence is also evident in the extensive woodwork in the stairs, ceiling beams, cabinets, wainscoting and trim. And, there’s a Japanese influence in the lattice panels on the stairs, reminiscent of the *shoji*

screens used for tea ceremonies and Buddhist rites.

“We milled all the woodwork on the site, so we were able to design trim to establish a unique style for the house—a design theme we could easily carry through,” says Wauson. “We don’t do the same thing from room to room; rather, we try to relate things instead.”

The house itself holds the environment sacrosanct and—in keeping with the Craftsman philosophy—it was built with nature at the forefront, from both a conservation and green building perspective.

For example, the rooms bring the outside in. For a loft above the living area, architect Canada raised the roof and bumped out walls to create higher, airy ceilings.

The home’s decks are on the north and west side of the house, which protects the interior from intense sun. Three of the home’s four sides are earth-sheltered—dug into the hillside so there’s no need for insulation in those sections of the house because the ground helps to cool it in summer and keeps it comfortable in the winter.

Outside, there’s a natural spring at the home’s entry level that cascades into a stream, then a grotto and finally a koi pond to control runoff. It’s a self-sustaining water source that’s fed not only from rainwater, but also via condensation from the home’s refrigerator and icemaker. And instead of downspouts, the house has Galvalume “rain chains” so that rainwater goes gently to the ground instead of in big gushes.

“All you’d need to do is add cisterns, and all the rainwater could be harvested and used for irrigation,” says

Canada. “It could run the grotto, the pond and serve as a permanent water source for wildlife.”

Because of the careful use of native plants and attention to landscaping that nurtures the environment, the property has been certified as a natural wildlife habitat by the National Wildlife Federation, attracting deer, heron, snakes, multiple bird species, armadillos, foxes, opossums and other creatures.

“You can always pay someone else to offset your carbon footprint, but there’s a lot you can do on a property when you control a little part of the Earth yourself,” says Wauson. “It’s an interesting aspect that we need to start looking at more. You can do something green without xeriscaping that also conserves water and other resources.”

Wauson and Canada used natural, local materials wherever possible; the limestone columns that flank the back of the house are local, as is the flagstone, and there’s more stone from the Texas Panhandle.

Canada, who has worked with Wauson on various projects over the last thirty years, says the project was a true collaboration that shows in the end result.

“Craftsman is just one of the many styles sought after here in Austin, and Steve has put together great tradespeople,” he says. “There’s a lot that goes into this kind of Craftsman architecture.”

Amy Lemen writes about shelter for local and national publications. Her goal is to get her own house organized before school starts. Got a cool house? Know of a cool house? You may e-mail Amy at alemen@goodlifemag.com.

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Decorating Your Rental Space

Even though Austin has been spared the brunt of the housing crunch, getting a loan to buy a home is harder now and many of us will for some time continue to live in apartments, duplexes or houses that aren't actually ours.

I've rented a variety of places for many years and it's not a bad option. But since it's not my property, there's a limit to what I can do to the place. This makes decorating tricky.

If you are renting, however, there are ways to give your place the style and feel you want without investing too much money or breaking the rules on your lease agreement.

One of the quickest and least expensive ways to change the look and feel of your place is to replace the hardware on your drawers and cabinets. You can buy knobs and handles in a variety of shapes, styles and colors at any home improvement store for just a few dollars each. You also can find decorative switch plate covers in a variety of colors as well as ones made of brass, stainless steel and wood. These little accessories can add big style to your home without making a huge investment. When you move out, you can either take them with you (just remember to keep the old ones so you can put them back) or leave them behind.

Rental spaces are usually painted white or some other bland color, which can make your whole place feel impersonal, lifeless and uninspiring. Painting the walls in the colors you love can add pizzazz to your

home, achieving your own style with very little work. Many landlords don't mind if you paint as long as the walls are repainted the original color before you leave, but avoid potential problems by making sure to find out beforehand.

If your landlord says no to painting, you can still add some life and interest to the walls with window treatments and artwork. Since you don't have color on the walls to contend with, opt for large art pieces that are bright, bold and full of detail. Putting up large curtain panels in your chosen colors and patterns can give the walls some paint-free color while softening harsh light from outside.

For those who aren't allowed to put a hole in the wall, home improvement and hardware stores have a number of adhesive options—from hooks to wire clips to poster squares—that can keep your decorations securely on the wall without leaving a mark. Use tension rods for curtains and other large wall hangings.

Regardless of the lease specifics, your landlord's main concern is that you leave your rental space the way you found it. While you can't change everything in your rental space, it's still possible to make a few simple and temporary adjustments. And with minimal investment and just a little bit of work, you can make any place your own, even if it doesn't belong to you.

—Whitney Angstadt

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