



*Offering the sensation of being inside a glass cube, the living room is eclectically furnished with an emphasis on the views. Supported by a grid of steel tubing, the windowed wall is 25 feet wide and 22 feet tall. Despite the height of the windows, the use of insulated, low-E glass and a geothermal HVAC system keep energy bills surprisingly low.*

# CUBE OF GLASS

## CREATING A “TREEHOUSE” HIDEAWAY IN KESSLER PARK

BY ELAINE ROGERS • PHOTOGRAPHY BY TERRI GLANGER

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Although the notion of living in a glass house is one most folks would consider merely figurative, Dallasites Annemarie Bristow and Larry Shinkaruk have managed a first hand experience with the sensation and found it quite pleasing. Their Kessler Park residence is a modern, steel beamed structure of concrete, glass and wood that serves up airy views of treetops and the downtown skyline along with a strong sense of vanishing into a grown-up version of a secret treehouse.

It all started with a small parcel of investment property and thoughts of building something atypical. The couple was living in Rockwall in 1994 when they found the steeply sloped lot that promised terrific views of the Dallas skyline—if they could just figure out what to construct. Given the nature of the land, it was likely to be irregular, so they pondered the possibilities for four years. Because Annemarie runs an engineering firm, Larry says they were set on the idea of designing a residence with a structural steel frame, but otherwise, plans were vague.

“That was our livelihood, so it was kind of a natural goal,” he explains.

“It’s not what most home builders are accustomed to, though, so it opened up some different possibilities. With steel, you’re talking about no load-bearing walls and a structure with more of a commercial feel.”

By the fall of 1998, the couple had met with Dallas architects Gary Cunningham, Sharon Odom and Brent Brown, and were ready to get serious. “We wanted a steel frame, concrete, glass and warm wood,” Larry says. “That was our only criteria. Beyond that, we gave them carte blanche.”

Retired from a career in the technology industry, Larry is an avid wood worker, and acted as general contractor on the home. That’s really just a fancy way of explaining how he did the lion’s share of the work himself, he notes, and he and Annemarie camped out for an 18-month stretch in the home’s unusual concrete-blocked guest quarters that attach to the main structure by a short walkway. “We built that first and moved in there in the summer of 2000,” Larry recalls. “We pretty much lived off the barbecue for a year and a half while I worked on this.”

To access the home from the street, visitors take a steep hike up 50 concrete steps or enjoy a more relaxing trip up on a two-person tram, a recent addition along with a detached garage at the base of the hill.





*Persian carpets, a wood-planked ceiling and a rectangular glass table with seating for eight flirt with formality in the dining room, but casual comfort is the order of the day in the adjacent living room.*

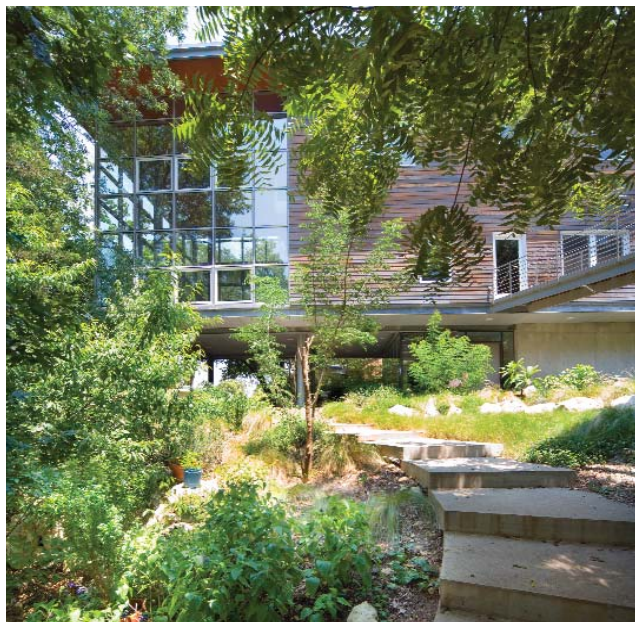


*Within a glass-walled entrance, stone leads visitors toward the stairway's unusual hand-hewn treads while offering Zen-like glimpses of a fountain and a private rock garden situated beneath the steel beamed home.*





The kitchen is well-equipped for cooking with a large island, stainless steel countertops and high-end appliances, while blue barstools matched to the unique blue swirled Venetian plastered ceiling also make it an appealing spot for socializing. Adding warmth to the modern space: maple cabinetry with trim and several island drawers constructed from antique purpleheart wood. Behind the white door, an elevator connects to the ground floor and the upper level for added convenience.



A walkway of 50 concrete steps leads up a steeply sloped property to the 3,600-square-foot modern home, and a small electric tram also makes the trip. With a redwood exterior stained the color of tree bark, the owner-built residence blends in with its trees, rendering it practically invisible from the curb.

From the road, the home's lofty perch gives it a surprisingly low profile as the natural barrier of the lot's bountiful trees hides the curtain-free walls of glass from casual viewing. Additionally, a redwood exterior stained the color of tree bark allows the owner-built residence to blend with the trees and makes it practically invisible from the curb.

A stone and concrete cubby with glass walls, the entrance is situated at the base of hand-hewn wood stairs made from on-site trees lost to construction, and offers secretive views of a rock garden and a small stone waterfall beneath the raised, steel-beamed structure.

Upstairs, the aesthetics of the home capture the most attention with the main rooms geometrically styled like a two story cube with the floor-to-ceiling windows on one side and parts of two others. Supported by a grid of steel tubing, the windowed walls are 22 feet tall and 23 feet wide, and jut into the trees for a surrounded-by-nature special effect.

The modern kitchen, with a large stainless steel island, countertops and high-end appliances, is warmed by maple cabinets and brightened by the glassy purple and peach swirled colors of unique Venetian-plastered concrete walls. It is a welcoming entertainment zone with two adjacent outdoor patios, a plethora of cookbooks and serving ceramics, plus contemporary blue-cushioned barstools matched to the eye-catching blue plaster of the room's ceiling.

Throughout the main rooms, a series of Persian carpets adorn the hand-troweled and glazed concrete floors. Near the steel-cabled stairs, a large rectangular glass table with seating for eight establishes the formal dining area, a space imbued with a more elegant feel courtesy of the furniture, a wood-planked ceiling and the dramatic lines of the stairs. Beyond that lies the airy, glass-encased living room where the modern décor feels simultaneously casual and eclectic, and it is here where the treehouse effect is particularly distinct. Leather furnishings and a neon green media console are accented by a





*The sleek master bath touts his and her vessel sinks with glass vanities and chrome fixtures warmed by vanilla onyx floors. Privacy rules in this zone with the upper level devoted exclusively to the master quarters and spare bedrooms situated "next door."*



*Housing a roomy master suite with a minimalist style, the home's upper level offers a continuation of the main rooms' dramatic views.*





Windows from the master suite look down toward a large roof patio atop the home's detached two-bedroom, two-bath guest quarters.



Practically designed, small bedrooms in the guesthouse connect with pocket doors to a joint kitchenette and to separate bathrooms. A central shower, sunken and styled with small, neutral-colored tile with a prism glaze, offers some surprises: It is separated from the kitchenette by a frosted glass wall that features several see-through spheres of clear glass that coordinate with rounded shower windows in shades of blue, pink and green.

sprinkling of Zen-like greenery and charmingly rustic touches such as a wood coffee table Larry made from an obviously ancient tree. It is a generously sized wall-free space, yet the plentiful design elements are all-but-dwarfed by the startlingly dramatic windows and sunlit, woodsy views.

A master suite roosts on an upper level suspended by steel cables and chest-high walls afford a continuation of the home's airy views. A cabin-styled bed dominates the sleeping chamber, and although it seems a surprising choice for the space, it emphasizes the treehouse theme. Annemarie's minimalist décor allows unobstructed appreciation of the private zone's light-colored wood floors, both in the bedroom and a separate sitting area. But, in the bath and roomy walk-through closets, vanilla onyx is the flooring of choice.

Recycled and salvaged wood is an especially powerful component of the home's décor, and almost every corner has a story to tell on that account. Wood paneling overhead and on various walls are eye-catching in teak while a wood planked ceiling in the dining area and wood accents in the kitchen are made from purpleheart lumber recycled from a kiln in a South American rainforest, lumber that Larry guesses is close to 300 years old. Handrails as well as the stair treads all sprouted from trees lost to the project and Larry notes that the patinas differ with the age of the wood: 80 years for the treads and 30 years for the rails.

The guesthouse entails two bedrooms, a tiny kitchenette, separate-but-connected powder rooms and a central bath. Design components range from a wood grain pattern imprinted on the concrete walls to circular stained glass windows on the sunken tile shower that are echoed by peek-a-boo spheres of clear glass on the frosted glass partition between the kitchen and bathing zones. Designed with a flat roof, the guesthouse also accommodates a concrete terrace that provides ample space for outdoor entertainments.

Additionally, the home incorporates a variety of green building technologies, mostly, Larry explains, because Gary Cunningham was familiar with them and made suggestions about installing such features as a geothermal HVAC system, radiant heated floors and low-E glass throughout for superior insulation. "We didn't know anything things like the geothermal system," Larry says, "but once you start researching it and realize you could install something that has a four-to-one efficiency over the traditional electric air conditioning unit that contractors are putting into most new homes, well, why wouldn't you?"