

BACKYARD BLISS: 6 COOL POOLS Pg. 68

# AUSTIN HOME

Austin & The Hill Country

INDOOR / OUTDOOR

## 15 Homes That Embrace Living Outside

Donna Stockton-Hicks  
Pemberton Heights Place

SUMMER 2017 US \$4.95



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# A Fresh Start



one-of-a-kind home in Pemberton Heights  
changes the lives of its 65-year-old  
homeowner and 36-year-old designer

By **GENE MENEZ**

Photography by **JULIE HOLDER**

## Every day at

5 p.m. Donna Stockton-Hicks has a date with Austin.

She grabs a glass of wine from her kitchen, walks over to the southernmost spot in her house and plops down on a plush, emerald-green sectional. If lucky, she is joined by her companion: Cleo, her 1-year-old, standard poodle puppy whose white hair is almost as glamorous as her owner's.

Stockton-Hicks calls this spot the View Room, and there's good reason. From there, looking southeast through huge panes of glass doors and windows, she has an unobstructed panorama of the Austin skyline. It's as if a postcard came to life.

"It's just beautiful," she says, with the most charming Texas drawl. "It's a million-dollar view. There's not a better one."

Stockton-Hicks' new home in tony Pemberton Heights has provided her a fresh perspective—but not just of the skyline. The longtime Austin interior designer, successful businesswoman, prominent philanthropist and woman about town has evolved in many ways during the three years she has been involved with the house, all for the better.

The project also has transformed Matt Garcia, the residential designer who worked on the home even before Stockton-Hicks came on board in 2014.

The house is barely six months old, but it already has had a profound effect on its 65-year-old homeowner and its 36-year-old designer.



The Lindsey Adelman globe light fixture can clearly be seen by guests as they approach the front of the house (this page), which features old-growth western red cedar for warmth. Once guests make their way to the back of the home, they get an unobstructed view of the Austin skyline (opposite page, top) from a space that Stockton-Hicks (opposite page, bottom) calls the View Room.



One of Stockton-Hicks' favorite spots in the house is the tub in the master bathroom (this page, left), one of seven bathrooms in the house (four full, three half); the dining room (this page, right) features a second Lindsey Adelman chandelier and a painting by George Rodrigue; the kitchen (opposite page, left) does not open to the living or dining rooms because it is designed to be more of a caterers' kitchen; because of Stockton-Hicks' love of art, several paintings (opposite page, right) and sculptures are on display.



## The project began in

2011 when Garcia, who had just left Dick Clark + Associates to open his own firm, was hired by a couple with young children to design a modern home to replace a dilapidated one on a lot in Pemberton Heights. The project was just the second for his firm and a coup for the then 29-year-old.

Garcia had one primary objective in the design: maximize the view of downtown Austin. The existing house did not take advantage of the view because it was built long before the skyline became anything to look at.

So Garcia drew up one section of the house to be as far south and as far west as possible. The long and narrow wing navigated several heritage oak trees in the backyard, and Garcia knew immediately that this would become the signature space of the house.

Permits were approved. Construction began. The foundation was laid. But in 2014, the homeowners decided to put the property on the market. The future of the project and Garcia's role in it were in jeopardy.

"It was one of the worst days of my life easily," he recalls. "Absolutely devastating."

Two days later Garcia received a call from Steve Hicks and Stockton-Hicks. The couple had bought the property and wanted to meet with Garcia about possibly staying on the project.

He interviewed with them and won them over.

"We never considered anyone else," says Stockton-Hicks, who has worked with dozens of architects over the years as an interior designer and as co-owner of the Stockton Hicks Laffey wholesale showroom.

At the couple's request, Garcia made some changes to his design: the kitchen was relocated and closed off because Stockton-Hicks throws a lot of philanthropic parties and doesn't want the caterers in view; the office was eliminated in favor of a larger master suite; interior walls were moved; and finishes were changed, turning the home from stark modern to more soft contemporary.

"The house got better," Garcia says.

But then, in the middle of construction, life threw two unimaginable curveballs Stockton-Hicks' way: she and her husband of 25 years were getting a divorce, and she was diagnosed with breast cancer.

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An interior designer, Stockton-Hicks says she didn't "have to do anything special" with the furniture in the living room (this page, top) or the rest of the rooms because the house "is about the architecture;" the entry (near right) features a torso sculpture by Charles Umlauf, one of 10 Umlauf pieces in the house.



Several paintings, including many from acclaimed Austin artist Roi James, and photographs adorn the walls. With a background in art history, Stockton-Hicks would not have it any other way.

"I feel that my art is as important as anything in my life," she says.

The farther one walks into the home, the more surprising it becomes. The long and narrow wing takes guests past the formal living room, through the formal dining room, the see-through fireplace and, finally, to the View Room.

"There's always a breeze here," she says. "And to watch a big storm come in is just fabulous."

Now that the house is complete, both Garcia and Stockton-Hicks can reflect on what the home has meant to them. For Garcia, the six-year project has taken up one-sixth of his life. Other projects have come and gone while this one continued on.

"This project has translated into every project that came after it," he says. "This has been a total education."

It also was one for Stockton-Hicks, who hopes she has seen the last of the figurative storms roll through.

"I'm better for having worked with someone who's so young," she says. "I think we've helped each other." ▲