

# MODERN LOVE

OPPOSITES ATTRACT IN THIS RANCH HOUSE  
THAT'S GOT THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS.

By Helen Thompson • Photography by Ryann Ford



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**BEFORE WESTLAKE HILLS** was Westlake Hills, it harbored a ranch hidden in a valley of the rolling terrain. In the early 1980s, the oak-motted estate was a favorite place to visit for a boy from Albany, Texas, who loved to sit on the wide first-floor windowsill of the two-story limestone ranch house and look down at the pond. “It was pretty cool,” the now grown-up young man recalls. “I could sit there and feel like I was in the country but be in the city.”

That man ended up moving to Austin, where he and his wife had just completed renovating a house, when he ran into the owner of the ranch. His wife recalls, “We were just saying, ‘Ah! Done! Finished!’ when my husband came home and told me that the old ranch house was available.” She agreed to take a look at the spread that had launched such vivid and happy memories for her husband. “But I was ready to rip it apart,” she says, “thinking maybe it wasn’t the same house he remembered when he was young.”

But, as luck would have it, the house was exactly as remembered—and its powerful charm penetrated any resistance wife and husband might have



Eucalyptus-clad cabinetry by Joseph Zambarano provides sleek storage in this kitchen designed by architect Kevin Alter of AlterStudio. The Arctic Pear chandelier is by Ocher; the rug is by Kyle Bunting.





Interior designer Tracey Overbeck Stead made sure that everything in this house could withstand abuse from four children, their friends and two dogs. The sectional is from the Verellen Home Collection. Coffee table custom through Tracey Overbeck Stead.



had. “We walked through,” she says, “and I said, ‘Yes, we have to have it.’” The multi-acre property is special, and backed up to a greenbelt, it looks even more expansive than it is. “The house had fabulous bones,” says the wife. It could—with a few changes—easily accommodate the two parents and their four children.

The biggest shift for the house would be attitudinal: The husband and wife share a design sense that’s modern and minimalist. In addition, they are major collectors of modern art. The traditional ranch house needed a modern makeover. The couple knew exactly who to seek for help and assembled a team that included interior designer Tracey Overbeck Stead, architects Kevin Alter, Gary Furman and Philip Keil, and Rick Scheen, the owner of LandWest Design Group.

“The homeowner wanted to turn this house into a contemporary house,” says Furman. “What had attracted him to the house in the first place was also what he wanted to preserve.” The house already had a contemporary layout: public areas on the first floor, the bedrooms on the second and a guest house connected to the main house by a breezeway. Plus,

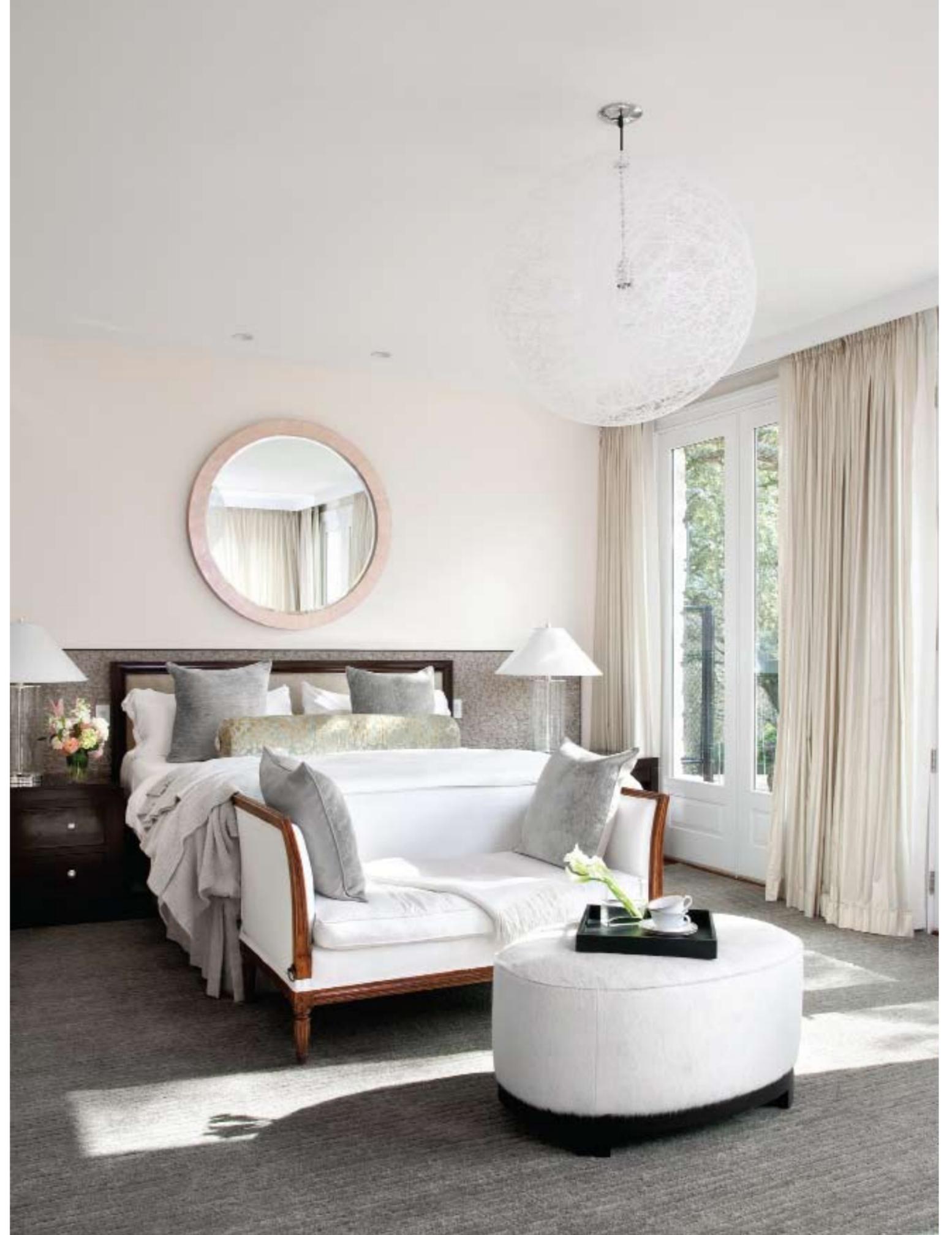
A once-dark entry hall (near right) is now luminous, thanks to plaster walls that subtly reflect light. The custom runner is by Madeline Weinrib; console is by JF Chen and is a good spot to display some of the owners' art. In the master bedroom, the chandelier is by Moooi.



there were other aspects—such as the fact that many of the rooms had windows on at least two sides and were lavishly endowed with light and breezes—that were up-to-date in intention if not in looks. “That’s what we’d do today,” says Furman.

But the materials—chunky limestone on the exterior, inferior finishes inside and awkward transitions from one room to another—needed redefinition. Furman judged that a major improvement could be wrought by replacing the old roof with standing-seam copper, adding a new gutter system and soffits and replacing the rickety front door and porch with a generously sized porte cochere. And, after much discussion, a master bedroom addition was nixed in favor of a more apt option—enclosing the breezeway and converting the guest house into the master suite.

Interior designer Tracey Overbeck Stead had worked with the homeowners before and appreciated their ability and interest in the process. “We make an amazing team,” she says. “They were bringing some things from their other home,” says Stead of the furnishings, but she added new rugs and other furniture to fill in the blanks. Stead also

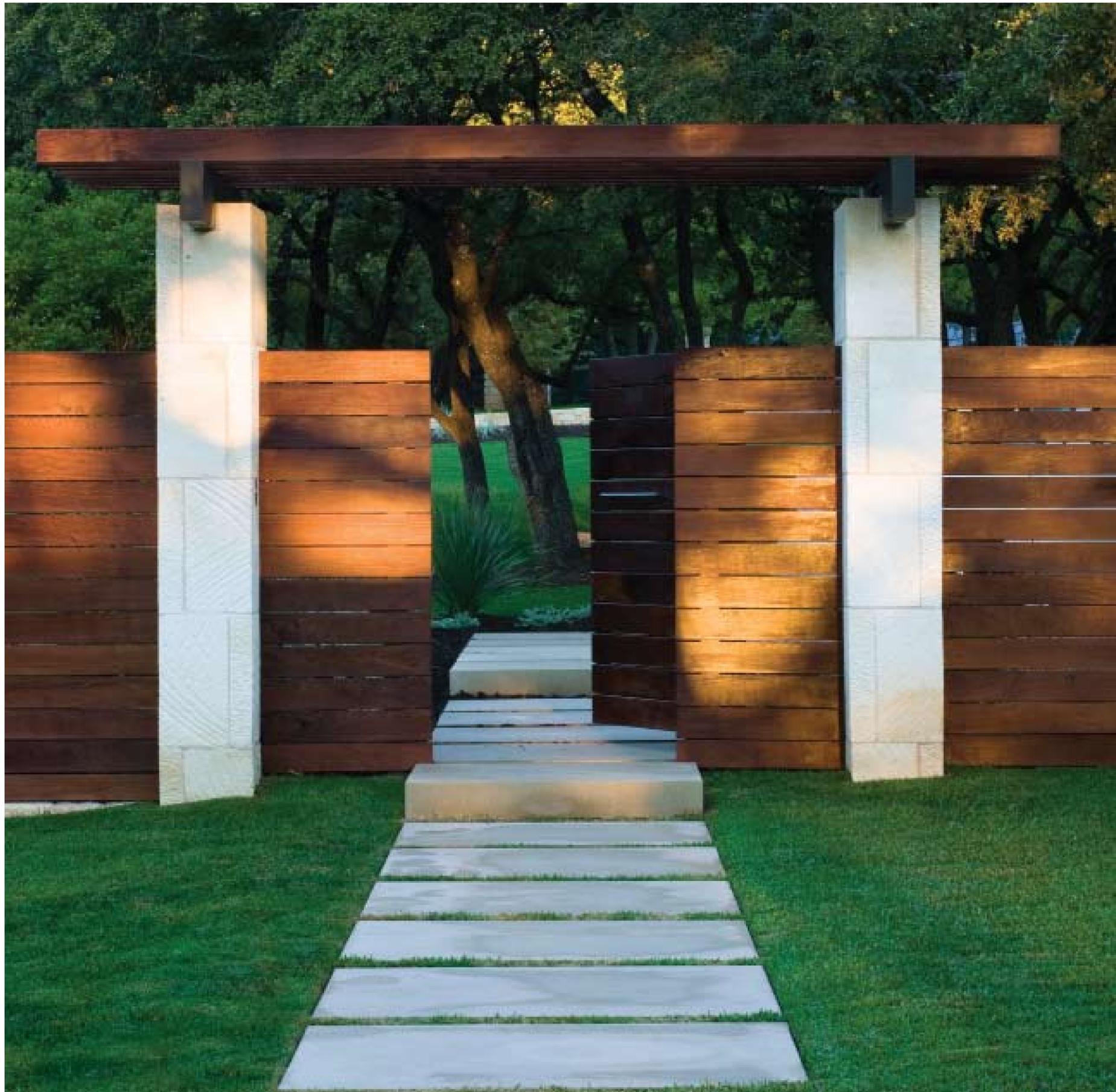


A rubber-dipped chandelier has retro style in the bathroom, where the Waterworks .25 Freestanding tub and a cowhide rug by Kyle Bunting preside. Far right: a mending wall is a modern divide.



worked with the wife on new lighting for all the rooms. Fixtures such as the Moooi globe in the bedroom and the Ochre Arctic Pear pendant in the family room were an instant way to introduce modern chic. New flooring, tile and millwork in the bathrooms—as well as the iconic Waterworks tub in the master bath—kept up the pace. All the while, attentive to how every selection must hold up to the onslaught of four active children and all their friends, Stead outfitted the house fashionably to suit the parents as well. “Every piece I put in that house had to also be useful,” she says.

When the building was completed, furniture installed, lights turned on and all the art hung, the homeowners got to sit back and take note of the scope of their achievement. “Hill Country modern instead of Hill Country ranch,” says the husband admiringly. Best of all, though, was how it seemed to fit the couple perfectly. “It’s the closest I can come to feeling like I live on a ranch,” says the husband. And for his wife, who is from New York, he says, “It’s still like being in the city.” After all, that was what had attracted the boy from Albany, Texas, to the house in the first place. [amh](#)



## HOW TO UPDATE A BLAH LANDSCAPE

One of the reasons this old ranch looked out of date was its wild and woolly landscape. And one of the most noticeable ways to modernize the spread was to modernize its setting. "My clients' taste is clean and contemporary," says Rick Scheen, the owner of LandWest Design Group. "They wanted the landscape to reflect the new look of the house." He and landscape architect Ramon Suarez set about the task by examining their clients' art, the architecture of the house and even how the couple looked and dressed. And then they got out the bulldozers and effected transformational changes.

HERE'S WHAT THEY DID:

**1** Changed elevations to create planes of space in place of ill-defined areas (look at a modern painting, and you'll see similar patterns).

**2** Defined the elevation changes with steel edges (no picket fences in this scenario).

**3** Used grass textures to indicate changes in planes—some areas have soft grassy lawns, others are manicured. The gravel drive defines where private space starts.

**4** Made old elements, such as the mending wall (previous page), look cutting-edge by using modern building techniques. The wall resembles an art installation as much as it does a utilitarian boundary. An ipe fence is all about clean lines and streamlined shapes.

**5** Groomed and sculpted the oaks to play up their stark beauty.

**6** Added sculpture to the yard to extend the owners' collection outside.