

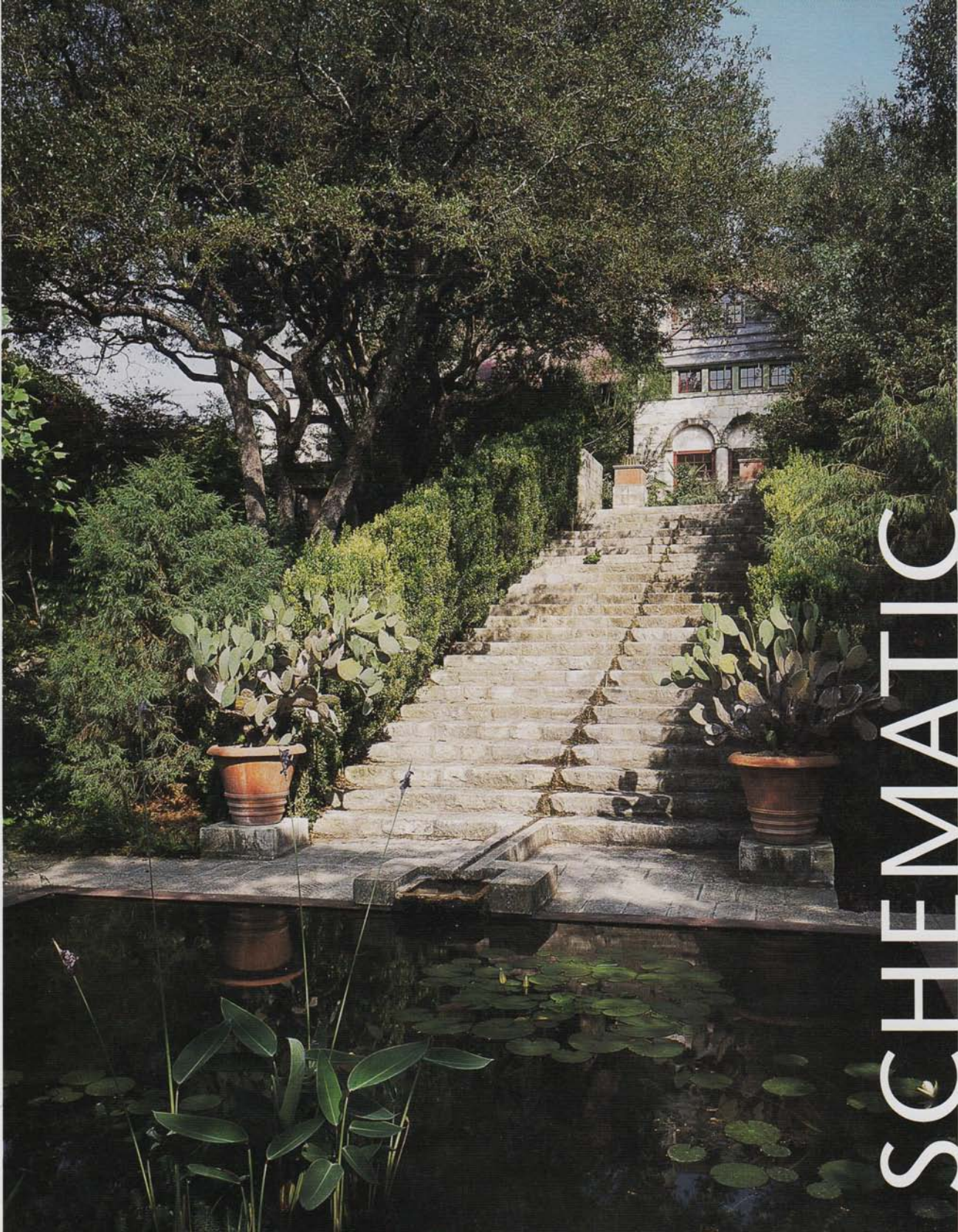
TRIBEZA

a u s t i n

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# SCHEMATIC : THE CREATION OF NEW EYES

\*SCHEMATIC is a monthly feature of exceptional design in Austin. To have a design considered for publication in SCHEMATIC, please email sample images and a description to [schematic@iribeza.com](mailto:schematic@iribeza.com)

PHOTOGRAPHY ATELIER WONG PHOTOGRAPHY



LEFT: STAIRWAY TO WATER. TOP: THREE DISTINCT ROOFS.

## DISCUSSING CLARITY

MELL LAWRENCE ARCHITECTS  
+ JAMES DAVID, OWNER

This house and garden are the result of a 27-year evolution of the two working together. We have gone through a process of adjusting one and then adjusting the other and then going back to adjust the other again. It's an ongoing process that constantly changes the way the two relate to each other.

When you live in a place for a long time, you need to create "new eyes" to re-look at things because you stop seeing them. So you make adjustments and changes and then all of a sudden there's clarity again. >>



For me, the garden is about clarity. It gives people cues about where to look, what to look at, and what's important.

In that way, the garden is a lot like architecture because it creates beautiful spaces by harmonizing things like texture, shape, and light modulation. And for me, the garden is also about plant collecting and trying to grow new things, and expanding the palette of what grows in Austin.

As a plant collector, I have to be careful to avoid having plants crowd out the vistas, so it's a challenge to keep it simple. It's a constant editing process because gardening is a fleeting and ephemeral art. In contrast, architecture is much more stable; even a building in total ruins can evoke an image of what the building was once like. But neglect a garden for two weeks in the summer, and there's nothing left. And it's always changing: Things are growing or dying, or growing too fast; or being dug up by armadillos. The garden is always in flux, it's changing all the time because it's a living thing, while the architecture is a constant and unchanging element.

The garden is also a cultural place — a place to live life. In the summer months, I spend as much time in the garden as I do in the house. It's really an extension of the house; I don't see it as something separate at all. So when we've changed the house, we've tried to change it in a way that incorporates the garden into the views.

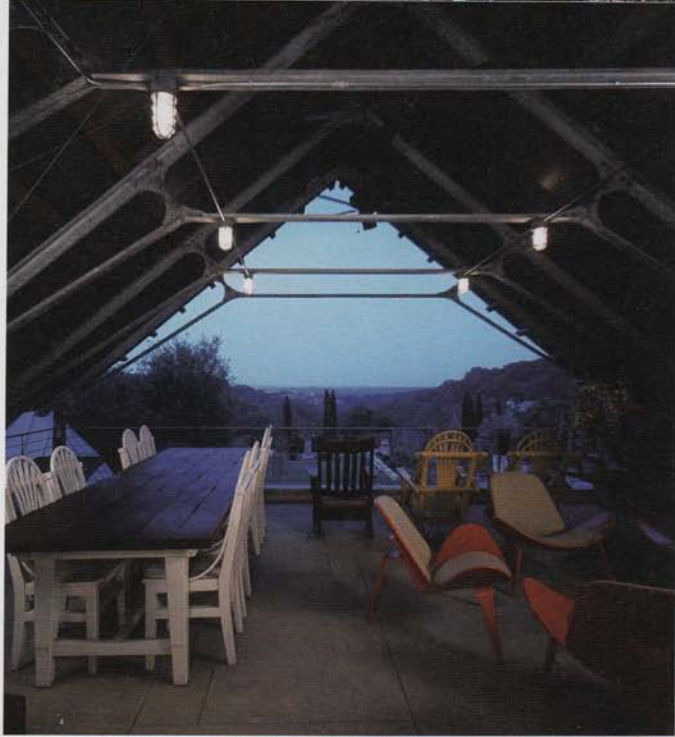
When we tackled this addition with Architect Mell Lawrence, we started with the need for an extra bedroom in the house with a bath

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TOP: STREET-SIDE VIEW OF COVERED TERRACE.  
LEFT: SEATING ON COVERED TERRACE AT DUSK.  
OPPOSITE: THE TOOL SHED.



and closet space. But the design was really driven by the desire to extend a corridor from the living room through the library out to the garden, and to create a particular vista where we couldn't have before. We didn't want to chop the house up into a bunch of small spaces or violate the original spaces that James Coote had designed. Also, we did not want the house to seem extravagant in any way, so we made simple choices wherever we could. We wanted to do the best job we could and be smart about materials and how they were used. Mell was very open minded and receptive, so there was a certain ease and trust between us throughout the process.

I like the clean lines and the simplicity of the addition; its combination of textures and the tactile quality the materials bring. Like the garden, the design challenges me to maintain a certain simplicity and clarity in the space. And while the decision to cover the terrace was a difficult one (it was quite beautiful) it made a great deal of sense because its exposure to the sun had made it unusable for us. Putting the roof on the space actually created a whole new room.

– james david, owner

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TOP LEFT: DETAIL OF WATER FEATURE TOP RIGHT: DETAIL OF POND STRUCTURE.  
OPPOSITE: UPSTAIRS BEDROOM ALLOWING TERRACE EXIT.

Treading lightly is always a great challenge in architecture. In approaching the addition to the home of James David and Gary Peese, which had previously been beautifully shaped by the hands of Architects James Coote and Paul Lamb, I faced a challenge that is uncommon in architecture. How do you place architecture in a setting as extraordinarily beautiful as the garden that belongs to this house? In talking with David about our collaboration and spending time in the garden, it became clear to me that the house itself was a visitor to the garden, and as such, it should hang back and observe the same way a human visitor does. Often, a house is an object on the land and in nature that can define the outdoor spaces. In this case, the house is one part or participant in the garden ... “the shelter.”

A large urn at the north end of the garden created a visual axis for the corridor that runs through the entire house from the south garden through the dining/living room through the library, and out to the north garden and the valley beyond. We deliberately and carefully framed this north view with a glass door that brings this vista all the way into living space at the other end of the house. It's the only link from this part of the garden to the main floor of the house, and it became the central connecting element for the addition.

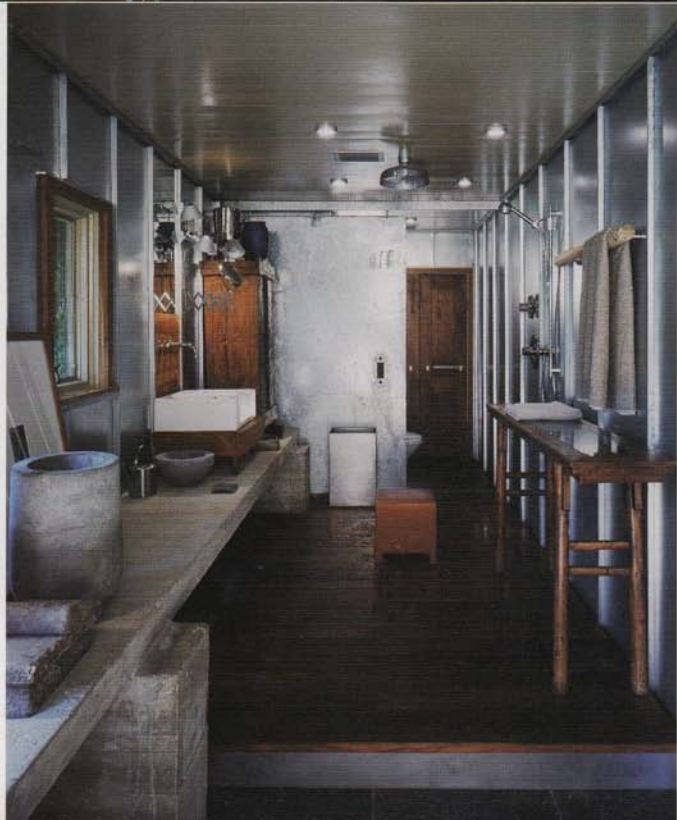
The design program called for the addition of three new rooms on the ground floor. The location of the existing garage (east of the axis) became the logical site because of its position adjacent to a beautiful garden that had long ago taken the place of the motor court, making the garage effectively inaccessible. In this space we created a slender boxcar-like space that serves as bedroom, design studio and bathing area. A thick, concrete counter runs the length of this room (functioning as a shelf, desk, seat and counter all at once). A long row of windows stand atop the counter and open directly into the east garden's morning light, sounds and fragrances. To the west of the axis are a spacious dressing area and a utility room.

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TOP LEFT: DINING ROOM AND LIBRARY.  
 TOP RIGHT: LIVING ROOM, ALLOWING EXIT TO THE BACKYARD.  
 BOTTOM LEFT: WASH ROOM.  
 OPPOSITE: NORTH ELEVATION.



On the second floor, the existing bathroom was simplified and opened to the new outdoor living room, formerly an unprotected roof terrace. While the terrace originally had sweeping views of the valley to the north and the hills to the east and west, the surrounding subdivisions had grown in intervening years, and houses and power lines had popped into view. We created shade with a new gable-end roof, which screens the undesirable, high views to both sides, while emphasizing low-side views into the gardens and the scenic view to the north. The effect is that of a protected, airy, but private outdoor room high above the valley and the garden below. A colored glass lantern brings additional light into the space and creates a colorful sundial effect on surfaces in the room and the garden as the sun moves across the sky throughout the day.

Quite simply, the design was focused around the use of simple and durable materials and how those materials were shaped, scaled and detailed to integrate with the existing house and the garden. The house remains an observant visitor in its beautiful surroundings; a self-contained, but complementary element of this unique landscape. - *mell lawrence, architect*



## PROJECT RESOURCES

### ARCHITECT

*mell lawrence, aia,  
mell lawrence architects*

### GENERAL CONTRACTOR

*don crowell  
don crowell, inc.*

### LANDSCAPING

*james david,  
gardens*

### STONE

*gardens*

### GLASS

*ppg*

### DECORATIVE GLAZING

*bendheim glass*

### RAILINGS, HANDRAILS + METAL TRUSSES

*spillar*

### METAL DOORS + WINDOWS

*bliss noram*

### DOORS + HANDLES

*hawkeye glen*

### WOOD CEILINGS

*stripling blake*

