

**OUT IN THE OPEN**  
Rich in textures, geometry and variations in tones, the living room and the chic study beyond it exude warmth. "There are different layers, and that always helps the space," says designer Darla Bankston May. Opposite page: The other side of the living room is home to a limestone fireplace and a custom sectional by Swaim.



# HIT re FRESH

SUGAR LAND

An architectural overhaul and interior redo give a couple of empty nesters a contemporary second home made for family gatherings.

By Holly Crawford  
Photography by Peter Molick



When it came time to reinvent their former rental property as a second home, newly retired Mike and Julie Dawson wanted to transform the traditional 1970s patio home into a contemporary space with a generous helping of comfort for family gatherings—and enough wall real estate for favorite works of art. "We both love a clean, contemporary look and feel, but not edgy," Mike says. "We love collecting art, so while we wanted a very open-concept design, we wanted plenty of wall space and lighting for big art."

The couple, who split time between Houston and Santa Fe, wanted to downsize from a 7,000-square-foot home in Sugar Land. But it was important that the 2,500-square-foot remodel, located on the golf course at Sugar Creek Country Club, have enough entertaining space for their six children and their families, so the Dawsons worked with Jesse Hager and Heather Rowell of Content Architecture to rethink the two-story home. "They were looking for a change and wanted to open it up as much as possible with plenty of room for everyone," Rowell says. That meant clearing the interior of isolating partitions and providing a generous and bright entertaining area.

---

## Design Details

### Residence

Single-family home

### Location

Sugar Land

### Architecture

Jesse Hager, Heather Rowell and K. Shawn Peter  
Content Architecture  
contentarchitecture.com

### Builder

CB Cooper Construction  
cbcooperconstruction.com

### Interior Design

Bankston May Associates  
bankstonmay.com

### Vendors

#### Area

Television furniture and side table in living room, lamps in master bedroom  
area-houston.com

#### Arteriors

Fixtures above island in kitchen  
arteriorshome.com

#### Bolier

Thomas desk in study  
bolierco.com

#### Costantini Pietro

Barstools in kitchen  
costantinipietro.com

#### Global Views

Chair in living room  
globalviews.com

#### La Nova

Tile throughout  
lanovatile.com

#### Madison Lily

Rugs throughout  
madisonlily.com

#### Materials Marketing

Natural stone  
mstoneandtile.com

#### Peck & Company

Custom coffee table in living room  
peckandco.com

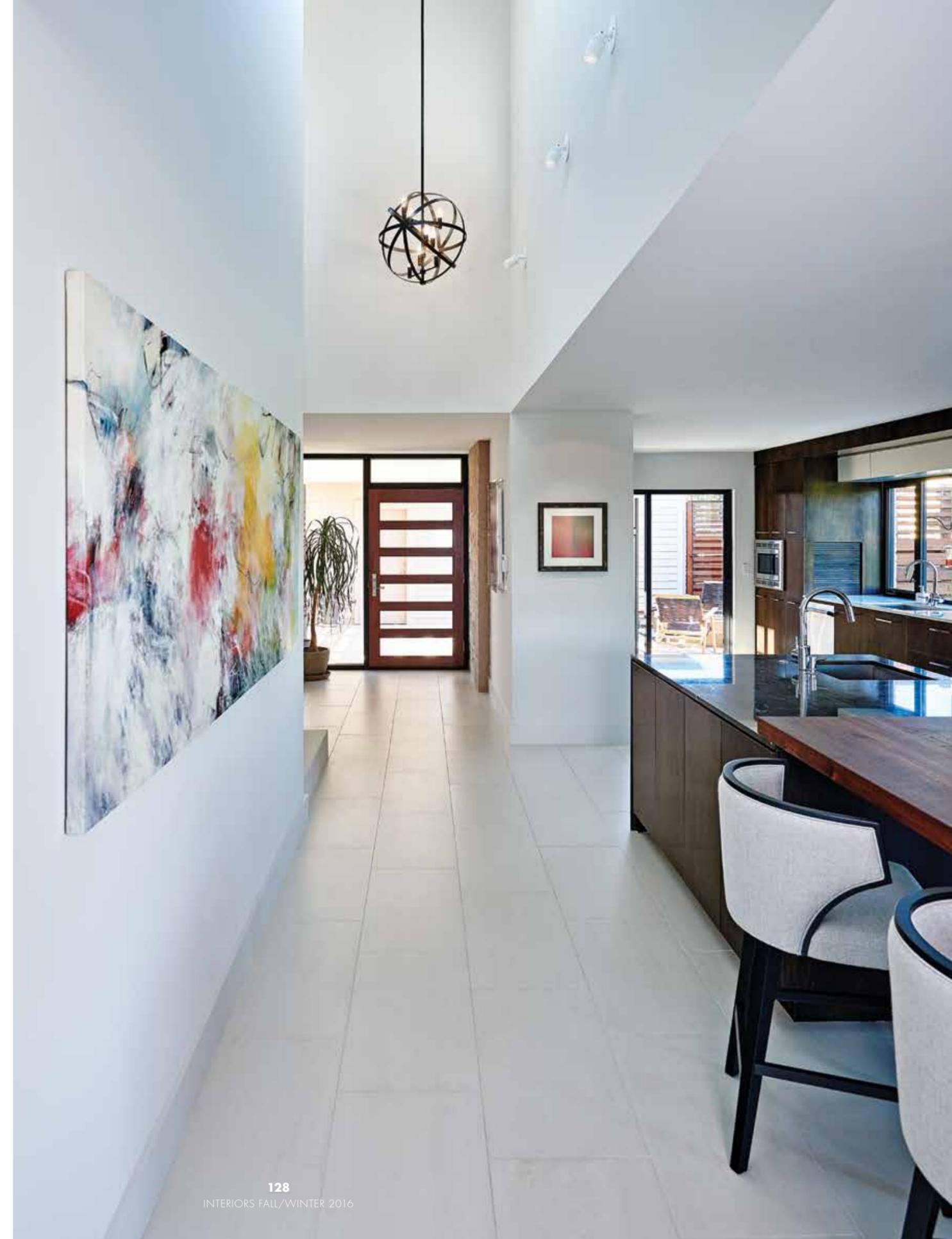
#### RAM Industries

Windows and doors  
ramwindows.com

#### Universal Ornaments

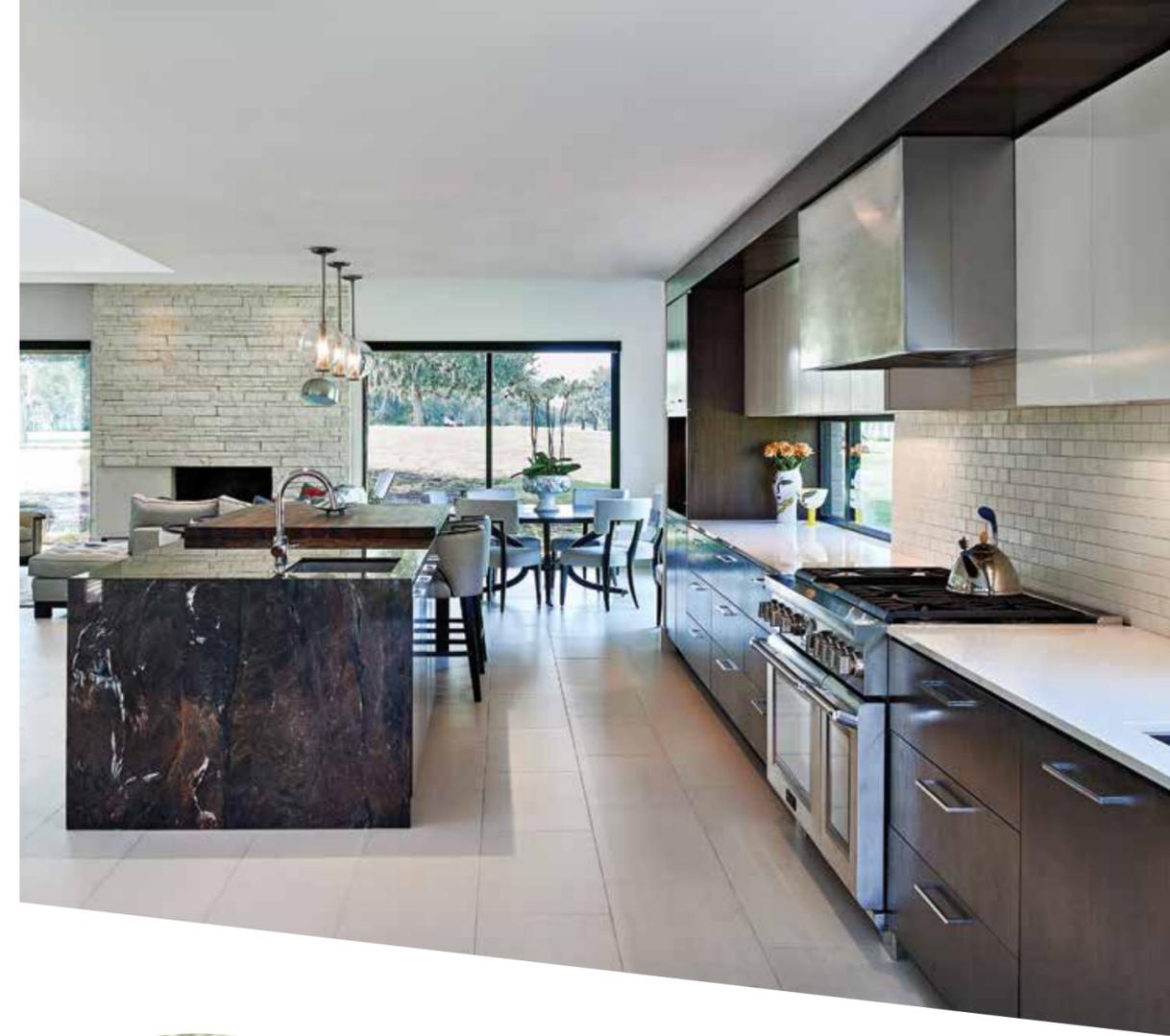
Custom entry gate  
universalconaments.com

---



### DOWN TO A FINE ART

From top: The kitchen's streamlined design, which features a waterfall walnut butcher block crafted for the space by Texas Treads, brings new meaning to a clean kitchen; chairs covered in Romo fabric and custom designed by Bankston May Associates surround a Dessin Fournir dining table from David Sutherland. Opposite page: A vaulted ceiling showcases not only the expansive Charlotte Foust painting, but also the home's clean lines and unique front door.



Rowell and Hager also restructured the home's entry sequence, adding a statement-making ipe privacy fence and pivoting door that leads guests to a courtyard with a fire table centerpiece. "The courtyard of the house was very sheltered and underutilized, so we changed it up as you enter," Rowell says.

A dramatic transformation in the kitchen area answered the couple's call for entertaining space and art appreciation. "We opened it up, so you can see through, from front to back, to a view of the golf course," Rowell says. To bring light into the space and provide a tall, naturally lit wall for art, the architects raised the ceiling and added windows above the stair and the adjacent first-floor circulation spine that connects the entry to the living area. "We wanted to bring light to the central spine of the home, the kitchen, and it created a surprise pop-up with a vaulted ceiling," Rowell adds. With so much prime, well-lit wall space, the art-loving homeowners commissioned for the gallery wall a large abstract painting by artist Charlotte Foust.



**SUITE ESCAPE** Clockwise from top left: For the master bathroom, the team at Content Architecture opted for a sleek shower with a linear drain and added a hidden vanity that flips up next to the double sinks; the master bedroom, which opens onto a private courtyard, is a calming oasis of muted shades and plush furniture like the Shaw bed by American Leather and the M Place by Malerba nightstand, both from Contempo Designs; one of the home's additional baths.



Interior designer Darla Bankston May of Houston-based Bankston May Associates (whose work Julie fell for when she saw it in a magazine) let vibrant pieces like Foust's—not to mention the lush outdoor views—sing amid an organic palette of creams, light grays and taupes, with splashes of darker gray and orange. "I like mixing cool colors with warm, and I wanted to make sure I didn't interrupt that gorgeous view inside and out," May says. "We made sure the furnishings were minimal and calm too."

The designer started almost from scratch with furniture, with only a dining room table and a baby grand piano to factor in. Space planning and requisitioning just the right chairs to complement the contemporary decor and the traditional dining table posed her biggest challenges—and sources of pride in the end. "I like that the space really does feel open and airy, not crowded, and they still have enough area to entertain in without feeling cramped," she says. "I promised them it would all fit, and I'm really proud the dining room chairs are comfortable and can accommodate the family."



Like the guts of the house itself, almost every piece of furniture was custom made to meet the specs of the home and its owners, and the Dawsons couldn't be more pleased. "Darla was a bit of a magician to find the perfect pieces that made it feel comfortable and seem larger than it really is," Mike says. "Between the amazing talents of Heather and Jesse at Content Architecture and Darla at Bankston May, we got exactly what we wanted." And apparently so did some of the neighbors. "We have people stopping by to find out who our architect was and knocking on our door to ask if the home is for sale," Julie says, laughing. But they aren't selling anytime soon. "It's so refreshing to come home to," she adds. And when the couple return to Texas after being in their New Mexico pueblo for a while, they unequivocally agree they are happy to call Sugar Creek home sweet home. ■

**MAKE AN ENTRANCE**  
From top: Homeowner Julie Dawson's favorite part of the house is the new ipe entryway, which sets the tone for the modern home; the original entry was a covered breezeway, and the courtyard was enclosed behind a wall at the entry. "We combined the breezeway and courtyard into one space to create a more inviting and usable procession and courtyard," says architect Heather Rowell.

