



THE COUPLE'S TINY
1927 HOME stands in its original cottage-scale glory in a neighborhood typified by large houses replacing teardowns.

“We stalked this cottage for years”

Cynthia Davis and Issac Preminger courted the previous owners with modest remodeling plans before buying this Houston hacienda

PHOTOGRAPHER MEGAN THOMPSON
STYLIST MINDI SHAPIRO LEVINE WRITER DAVID HANSON



THE LIVING ROOM works as both intimate conversation space and entertaining center with the folding doors enclosing or exposing the television.

Like a child's hidden treasure

in the gap of a brick wall, something special has been saved behind a wrought iron gate in Houston's Museum District. The neighborhood's quaint charm remains in its smaller homes, but new, larger homes have begun to dwarf the original bungalows. Luckily, local shop owner Cynthia Davis and her architect/designer husband, Issac Preminger, weren't looking for a teardown when they discovered a coveted piece of real estate: the little white cottage behind a simple adobe wall that's been tucked comfortably into a Tuscan-like courtyard since 1927.

Issac knew the original owner, a well-respected doctor who had emigrated from Argentina decades before. Although the doctor had been out of the house for years, he maintained ownership for his family and adamantly opposed selling for fear of what might become of it. So Issac, who'd lived in the same neighborhood and had always admired the 1,270-square-foot house with striped awnings, rented it with Cynthia for a while.

"A good house in Houston? You stalk that for years," says Cynthia.

Every now and then the doctor would visit Cynthia and Issac, toting the house's original drawings. Issac remembers: "He'd say, 'Now tell me what you're going to do to the house.' He'd see our plans and show us what he would do if he were to move back in."

Confident in the couple's modest and tasteful makeover intentions and feeling a connection to this recently married couple looking for their first house (much as he and his wife had done a half century before), the doctor sold, and the uncovering began. >

IN THE KITCHEN, a ceramic cow head from an old French shop stands guard over the nook Issac designed to fit a giant antique butcher block.





THE FORMER GUEST ROOM now makes for an airy dining room just off the kitchen. Issac designed and built this shelving using old French doors to expose the china inside.

SIMPLE GARDEN BORDER TILES along the floorboard connect inside to out.

"A lot of things had been cluttered and abandoned by various renters, so every summer we'd do one project and restore one room, usually getting down to the basics," says Cynthia. "We found the great stone fireplace under a giant plaster white one. Two windows on either side of it looked into a wall, so we removed those. They took the kitchen down to the subfloor, replacing electrical outlets and plumbing, and Issac designed a stucco hood trimmed in stone above the butcher block. We converted the tiny second bedroom off the kitchen into a dining room and added three matching, glass-paned doors leading outside."

"We didn't change the outline of the house at all," adds Issac. "You have to be humble and respectful of who was there before you."

With such small spaces in which to work, the restoration often centered around a single piece, such as the beautiful antique French butcher block in the kitchen. When they found it, Issac went about designing the rest to fit the block snugly into place beside the stove. In the living room the uncovered stone fireplace was the obvious anchor, but the couple continued the sturdy theme with a cement coffee table made by a Houston artist. The bath's masterpiece is the original sunken tub. The couple used tile reclaimed from an old European villa for the floor and salvaged the antique farm sink from Provence.

Cynthia—who owns Indulge, which sells mostly European linens, glassware, and gifts—initially filled the house with white fabrics and delicate furniture. All was fine until their briard (French sheepherding dog) had puppies and the two little fur balls they kept quickly grew to full size. >



Shop for Cottage Style

Cynthia owns Indulge, one of our Top 100 Shops for Cottage Style (January/February 2006, page 70). But she's quick to recommend her other favorite stores in Houston, especially since they're all within a few blocks of one another.

ANTIQUES DEALERS

The Gray Door 1809 W. Gray St.; 713/521-9085

Jane Moore Interiors 2922 Virginia St.; 713/526-6113

M. Naeve 1926 Bissonnet St.; 713/524-0990

W. Gardner, Ltd. 2930 Ferndale St.; 713/521-1027 or wgardnerltd.com

Watkins Culver Antiques 2308 Bissonnet St.; 713/529-0597

ARCHITECTURAL PIECES

Chateau Domingue 3615-B W. Alabama St.; 713/961-3444 or chateaudomingue.com

HOME FURNISHINGS

Neal & Company 4502 Greenbriar Dr.; 713/942-9800

Quatrine 2411 Times Blvd., Suite 120; 713/521-1915 or quatrine.com

Shabby Slips 2304 Bissonnet St.; 713/630-0066 or shabbyslipshouston.com

LIGHTING & FURNISHINGS

Brown 2940 Ferndale St.; 713/522-2151 or theshopbybrown.com

PLANT NURSERY AND GARDEN ACCESSORIES

Thompson + Hanson 3600 W. Alabama St.; 713/622-6973

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THE MASTER (AND ONLY) BEDROOM connects to the garden via French doors. Issac designed the upholstered headboard Cynthia sells in her shop. **AN ORIGINAL SUNKEN, TILED TUB** anchors the bath, and floor tiles salvaged from a European villa accentuate the old-world feel.



“We found ourselves with 30 pounds more dog than human. They overpowered us,” says Cynthia. “The old furniture had no chance, so we had to replace it all with stone, cement, and nonedible.”

That explains the abundance of faux-bois (imitation wood) and other sturdy pieces in the house. It also accounts for an interaction with outdoor living spaces. Instead of having an extra bedroom, the couple wanted more entertaining space that could also serve as a corridor to the backyard, where small tables and chairs hide in corners like in a European café. The converted dining room opens onto a patio.

“With three woolly mammoths of dogs, we needed much more living space, so the outdoors made perfect sense,” says Issac.

“And we like the extension that the backyard provides for entertaining,” adds Cynthia. “The dining room’s location and the new glass doors create an outside/in feel.” The placement of garden border tiles around the interior floorboard subtly underscores that connection to the garden.

By appreciating the house’s small, private character and expanding to the outdoors, Cynthia and Issac have managed to add intimacy and comfort that bring out the property’s original hidden charm. Every square inch—and there aren’t many—flows with just the right touch of personality. ■