

QUALIFIED
Remodeler

MASTER DESIGN SOLUTIONS

Postmodern Green

David Webber of Webber + Studio teamed with Trinity Builders to produce a small, postmodern style remodel that netted a Five Star green rating from the Austin Green Building Program

By Patrick L. O'Toole

Those who enjoy architecture history can see a good bit of it in the two-story addition designed and built for this single-story worker cottage. The



The rear of the original cottage is visible in this photo, above. Architect David Webber describes the roof and western wall as a "taco shell" that wraps the second-floor addition, at right.

first modernists of the Bauhaus school in the early 20th century. Le Corbusier among them, often sought to "remove the ground" from under the buildings they designed. Today you can see many modern structures with glassy, wide-open first floors and living or work spaces above.

David Webber of Webber + Studio in Austin, who designed the addition, liked hearing that someone had made this connection, but the glassed-in first floor was not a



conscious nod to those modernists. Today, nearly 100 years after many of these concepts were first conceived, the elements of modernism have become baked into the vernacular of thousands of architects.

Instead, Webber came about the shape and look of this solution honestly. He looked at the objectives of the homeowners, the attributes of the existing structure and the possibilities offered by the site, namely a small but green backyard, and fitted a solution that works well and looks outstanding to many disinterested observers.

Webber is of the viewpoint that large additions that mimic an older, existing structure tend to "diminish" the overall result. That is why his design for the home offers two distinct sections, an old and a new. This combination is a form of post-modernism, but again, the concept of blending starkly different old and new elements has become an established style. Webber employed the device pragmatically.

"The question is, how do you add on in a way that is modern and integrates. I think the worst crime is to build an addition in exactly the same way as the original house," says Webber. "The original house was oftentimes built many decades ago and it really is authentic, and if you just copy it, you diminish the importance of the original."

In terms of the massing, Webber's solution for the owners — a couple with plans to perhaps have a family — was to renovate and maintain the original structure while creating something completely new on the back. The idea was sparked by Webber's desire to offer inward and outward looking solutions to match with the function of



The glass-enclosed kitchen is bathed in natural light, offering a contrast with the darker more private sections above and in front. A pecan floor, at left, makes use of an indigenous Texas hardwood.

the spaces. In the front, with its two bedrooms and living room, it made sense to preserve the predominant attributes of the existing cottage — cool, dark, inward and cozy. The same goes for the second floor of the new addition. It houses a master suite and an office, so it made sense to offer an enclosed enclave. But for the new kitchen/dining room on the lower floor of the addition, Webber sought an open, outward feeling that offers a relaxing "suburban" feeling amidst the hubbub of the urban core.

"Our thought was 'why not design something that significantly contrasts with the house?' and yet the new roofline echoes the house, so you have that relationship," Webber explains. "Furthermore, we thought it would be nice to have the original part of the house be this cooler, darker, inward-looking space. And for the addition we thought of building something of a similar scale to the house, but that would be lifted up off the ground by this glass wall.

"So while the new addition upstairs remains cozy, quiet and of a similar scale to the rest of the house, the glass-enclosed kitchen below becomes this contrast — a sunny, bright, explosively outward-looking space."

Five-Star green

Why would anyone buy a 75-year-old, 900-sq.-ft. cottage (quite dilapidated) and spend approximately \$458,000 refurbishing it and adding an equal amount of square feet on the back? Through what prism does a decision like this make sense? Location has a lot to do with it. This cottage sits in the heart of an up-and-coming neighborhood where land values have far outpaced the caliber of the existing housing. The prism through which many residents of the Bouldin

section of Austin see things is one that places a great deal of stock in neighborhood charm, walkability and connectedness to a vibrant urban core.

Green building is another good reason that investing in a small, older home can make sense. The Austin Energy Green Building Program (the nation's first local green building program launched by a city-owned utility back in

1991) awards points for sustainability certification to projects located near the city center and its existing amenities. But location is just the tip of the green iceberg for this project. Among its many green attributes, the renovation and addition included a tight, but breathable, building envelope, the use of no VOC paints, employed an extremely durable fiber cement siding, which was installed in a fashion to allow moisture coming from within the home or from outside of it to quickly wick away from the building. It was also constructed of engineered lumber and sheathed in part with a layer of steel roofing material, both which have sustainable lifecycles.

Well before there was LEED for Homes, or the NAHB Green Building Guidelines, or the NARI and NAHB green professional certification programs, there was a collection of local or regional, mostly voluntary, green building programs. The programs in Portland, Ore., and Colorado stand out, but The Austin Energy Green Building Program was the first, and it is thought by many to be the most comprehensive. The rating system awards one to five stars based on points generated for adherence to dozens of optional green and sustainable attributes. This remodeling project achieved a five-star rating at its final testing in March of 2008.

To achieve the base level of certification, one star, 12 requirements must be met. These range from a maximum of 10 percent duct leakage and a home design that achieves 500 sq. ft. of living space per ton of cooling capacity to the use of low VOC paints and sealants and the use of cooling equipment that



Upstairs in the addition, a master bath and bedroom combination offers the privacy and comfort of the original cottage in front. Water-saving fixtures and green materials abound.



is 14.0 SEER or greater, and more. But a much higher degree of rigor is required to achieve the remaining four stars.

Extra points are available in the areas of site selection, home design, construction and waste management, building structure and enclosure, thermal and moisture control, plumbing appliances and mechanical selections. All told this project was awarded 165 total points. Anything over 150 is enough to garner five stars under the program. Webber attributes the winning of a five-star rating to the homeowner's commitment to support the many options required. But a good bit of it goes back to a deep interest, in a geeky detailed way, on the part of the architect and contractor to see that all of the possible green features get added properly to a good solid design.

"The thing about green remodeling and sustainability is that a lot of it is not very glamorous. Most of it is very boring. There is a lot of technical stuff that architects and construction nerds really get into,"

says Webber. "For example, we love engineered wood. As long as it does not have formaldehyde-based glues, we just love them because they are straight. They are clean. There's not a lot of waste. So we use them everywhere in our projects."

Looking at the bigger picture of competing green standards, Webber is less concerned about possible moving in the wrong direction on green. He encourages others to jump in and that over the long-term, programs that call for a decent amount of green rigor, like the one in Austin, will ultimately find ways to merge or develop reciprocity with the emerging national programs.

"We were doing green building as thoughtfully and as resource-efficient as we could before we ever thought of calling them green," says Webber. "It goes to the point that the overall goal is to be careful and thoughtful about the way we build, and if you are, you are probably already involved in green and sustainable building." | QR

PECIFIED PRODUCTS

Roofing: Prefinished, standing-seam metal roofing
Siding: James Hardie fiber cement
Cladding: Cypress (regional material) inscreen siding (on remodel)
Windows: Marvin Integrity
Doors: Marvin Integrity
A/C: Trane 17.25 SEER
Flooring: Pecan (local hardwood) downstairs, vertical cut bamboo flooring (upstairs)
Cabinets: Custom kitchen drawers and enclosures by Architect
Countertops: Caesarstone
Refrigerator: KitchenAid side-by-side refrigerator (Energy Star)
Kitchen sink: Ekay, LF6H-3322, stainless steel
Kitchen faucet: Grohe "Lady Lux" chrome
Sinktop: Fisher & Paykel 36 in. 3912-SS
Range hood: Euro Kitchen Spana 36-in. hood with remote blower
Dishwasher: KitchenAid I-Series, stainless steel (Energy Star)
Oven: KitchenAid I-Series, 30-in. thermal oven KEBC101KSS (Energy Star)
Chiller: KitchenAid - under-counter, stainless steel KUWS24RSBS (Energy Star)
Disposal: In-Sink-Erator
Washers/Dryers: Kohler
Water valve: Kohler "Stillness," polished chrome
Light fixtures: Toto "Aqua" dual-flush
Exterior lights: Kichler "Well lights", GA, exterior lights