A modern “cabin in the woods” offers its owner a weekend getaway for peace, quiet and maybe a little stargazing. Paddling the Brazos is a bonus.

The River House

By Media Breeden, Photos by Jeremy Azima
A weekend home near the Bravos River is environmentally friendly (solar panels, water capture system, sustainable materials), and the design is striking, inside and out.
While nature rules on this 26-acre property, Michael Kinter of Redentor's Landscape Design created walkways, paths, pavilions and patios to make getting around and enjoying the outdoors a little easier.

A low concrete wall, gravelled parking area and concrete steps lead to a clearing used as an outdoor living room.

A partially covered flagstone patio offers views of grazing deer, sunsets and, of course, the Brazos.

I want to see stars. And I want to be near water.” Those were two of Dave Smith’s biggest priorities when he began looking for property for a weekend home. Smith runs a Fort Worth-based aerospace company and was in search of a getaway that wasn’t an all-day trek but was far enough away to feel like a true vacation spot.

He found some acreage about 90 minutes away near the Brazos River in Mineral Wells — fitting, as Smith is a fan of John Graves’ Geodesic to a River. He was drawn to the undeveloped acreage where the river meandered along one edge, the low water exposing expanses of granite cliffs and large sandbars. Majestic post oaks and other native trees dotted the undulating property, and at nightfall, the sky twirled with pinpoints of light in

Kinter designed the 200-foot elevated boardwalk that Ferrar Custom Homes built of a composite material for durability. It connects the home to a patio near the river and uses LED lights to subtly illuminate the way after dark.
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The 100-year flood plain prevented the house from being built closer to the river, but the view from the banks of the Brazos is spectacular.

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The pavilion features steel-edge steps that help to define the space. A low concrete wall creates more seating. A steel frame is half covered with corrugated galvanized steel and metal cattle panels. Weetnema planted near the posts will someday provide shade.

The path in front of the house leads up to a gathering space on an elevated spot defined by more steel edging. Quarry blocks of limestone were set up as seating. Old-growth trees shade the area.

Innumerable such as one never sees in the city. While Smith had found the perfect spot for his weekend home, the next challenge was to build it, which required improving a dirt road just to get there. One of his main goals was to make the house sustainable. He had met Fort Worth's Don Ferrier after looking at the builder's commercial work. Don and daughter Heather are known for their green design and construction. "He wasn't quite the..."
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The home’s interior is a soothing retreat, and plentiful windows ensure nature is the star of the show. Area rugs throughout the home are from Feizy. A stacked stone wall in the living room features floating shelves with built-in lighting. A pair of Seda Italian leather chairs and a Burton James sectional offer comfortable options for after-dinner gatherings.

Interior photos by
Brian Recht
Photography

right fit for our office project," says Smith, “but I thought if I ever built a vacation home, I would like something more modern.”

A chance discovery at Southlake’s Art in the Square festival provided inspiration for the house. Smith’s interior designers eventually dubbed “A River Runs Through.” Drawn to the work of Flower Mound artist Erika Bush of Art Rocks Studio, who creates three-dimensional pieces using thin slabs of slate and river rock, Smith commissioned a custom piece for the Brasov house.

Early building efforts were not without their problems. Hopes of siting the home near the river were dashed after Smith learned that it would put the structure in the flood plain. Luckily, building on another spot close by also allowed preservation of
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The bathrooms feature dark tile with lots of texture and pattern. The black floor tile is low maintenance and user-friendly.

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most of the trees, another must on Smith's list. The distance from the river prompted a design feature — a long boardwalk — that is now one of the home's more unusual features.

While the house looks like a modern cabin in the woods, it's built to be as energy efficient as possible, using structural insulated panels faced with locally sourced rock and wood. A deep overhang helps shade the interior. The house is solar powered, and it captures 100 percent of rainfall. All the plumbing is low-flow; the lighting is all LED. "Since it was a weekend house, Dave wanted it to be off the grid as much as possible," says Heather Ferrier.

Designers Judy Jones and Shelly Bosonetto of SAJ Interior Design
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worked with the Ferriers and the homeowner during the building process of the 3,000-square-foot house. The women had worked with Smith before, in designing both his office and his Fort Worth home. They suggested adding more windows to the spacious living-dining-kitchen area, giving the house a more open feel while maintaining its energy efficiency.

For the interior, they came up with a comfortable and low maintenance look that complements the clean lines and glass expanses of the modern exterior. “We’ve known Dave a long time,” says Bosso, “so he has become a friend as well as a client. This project was an exciting one because it was more contemporary. It also was challenging because of the remote location, and there was a learning curve in...
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THE DETAILS
Design build: Ferrier Custom Homes, ferriercustomhomes.com
Interior design: SAJ Interior Design, srajdesign.com
Landscape design/build: Redentor's Landscape Design, redentor.com
Wood flooring: Green World Industries, masterpiecefurnishings.com


Bath fixtures: Rito Collection, Ferguson Bath, Kitchen & Lighting Gallery Fort Worth, ferusgon.com
Kitchen and bath countertops: Caesarstone, ProSource Fort Worth, prosourcesoutheast.com
Lighting: Custom dining room pendants: Hubbardton Forge Zephyr, outdoor entry sconces: Hubbardton Forge College, Ferguson Bath, Kitchen & Lighting Gallery Fort Worth, ferusgon.com
Fans: Minka Aire, Ferguson Bath, Kitchen & Lighting Gallery Fort Worth, ferusgon.com

Furniture: Select pieces from G. Maddox & Co., Dallas Market Center; Cantoni Dallas, cantoni.com; David Sutherland Showroom Dallas, davidatlantashowroom.com; Scott + Coene Dallas, scottcoene.com

Even the exterior light sconce, sourced from Ferguson Bath, Kitchen & Lighting Gallery in Fort Worth, offers an artistic touch.

SAJ Interior Design came up with the concept for the cantilevered table, which was built by Don Ferrier. Up side chairs with walnut arms and legs are from Cantoni. The homeowner loves to use his pellet grill, located outside just steps away. He also approves of the Regentor located at the end of the kitchen counter. The solid-surface Caesarstone complements the earthly Walker Zanger tile backsplash.

working with a green house.

Materials, including Hickory and tile used on the floors, are sophisticated but also user-friendly for the guest roster that includes friends, family and dogs.

Furnishings are minimal and carefully selected for their function and form. "Dave went out to pick up pieces such as the sectional, as he wanted them to be comfortable," says Bessonette.

Design choices were made with the river and land in mind, too. The triple pendant light over the dining table resembles a curving stream. A stone wall in the living room picks up on the natural surroundings, as do the beams in the ceiling. The tall casement windows crank open, allowing breezes to blow in; skylights in the bathrooms brighten the rooms. The commissioned artwork with its river resonance hangs prominently in the dining area.
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While landscaping is pretty much being left to Mother Nature, the Ferries brought in Michael Kincer of Redent's Landscape Design to add some special touches. Kincer was charged with keeping the property looking natural while creating an arrival area in front of the home, a gathering space on an elevated clearing under a canopy of trees and a pavilion closer to the river. Low concrete walls create seating; wide concrete steps allow an easy walk to the elevated "patio" where Smith hosted a party for his newlywed daughter. A 20-foot-long, elevated boardwalk Kincer designed to connect the river pavilion and the house is one of the property's most attractive organic features. The result is accessible seating areas shaded by trees where one can settle in to watch birds and deer and, of course, the stars.