

The essence of Charles Dilbeck's original design, constructed in 1936, can still be seen peeking out from the more modern adaptations the house has undergone.

XCRB

OVER A PERIOD OF EIGHT DECADES,
THREE ESTEEMED ARCHITECTS
LEFT THEIR DISTINCTIVE MARKS
ON ONE HOUSE.

text by **ROB BRINKLEY**
photography by **NAN COULTER**





1936



1936: Charles Dilbeck and his wife, Pat, at The Roosevelt hotel, New Orleans (circa 1950s). A fireplace cooking crane is one of the few remaining Dilbeck features in the home.



1976



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JACQUES “BUNKY” VROOM IS JUST OFF A TWO-YEAR ROLLER-COASTER RIDE. It’s no easy feat enlisting one famous architect to alter the work of two other prominent ones. Who would want that job? Frank Welch did, and he kept calling the Vrooms with idea after idea after seeing what the 40-something couple had purchased in University Park. Bunky and his wife, Anne Clayton Vroom, never imagined the prolific Texas modernist, a family friend, would take on such a cleanup project; they just wanted him to have a look. But Welch, almost 90 years old and busy as ever, “was obsessed with this house,” Bunky says.

Perhaps Welch was attracted to the absurdity of it all. The house’s twisted tale begins in the late 1930s as a garrison-style Colonial designed by Charles Dilbeck—himself prolific with his storybook cottages, French farmhouses, and Texas-style ranch houses dotted all over Park Cities, Preston Hollow, and Oak Cliff. The house was comprised of two compact

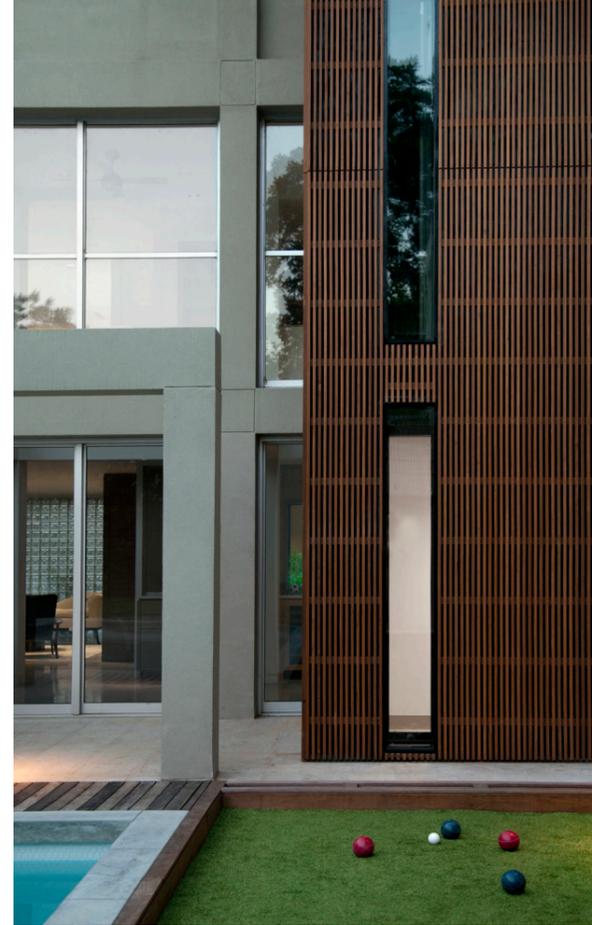
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1976: Woo’s influence can be seen in the home in its stairwell and its Mondrian, gridlike additions, including the glass block windows. Center: Woo poses in the house during a photo shoot for *Texas Homes*’ March 1986 issue.

DILBECK COURTESY PHOTO; WOO, DANNY TURNER

“I sometimes call this the Symphony House because of George Woo’s relationship with I.M. Pei [architect of the Morton H. Meyerson Symphony Center] and because so many architects have been involved in it. To bring the house back together, we needed more than just a talented architect—we needed a conductor who understood all the architectural instruments used here. Who could be better at this than Frank Welch?”

HOMEOWNER JACQUES “BUNKY” VROOM



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stories with a second-story overhang and romantic detailing—a Dilbeck signature. It remained that way until 1976 when architect George Woo and his wife came along. Woo was working for modernist I.M. Pei, whose sleek Dallas projects include the inverted pyramid of Dallas City Hall and the geometric Morton H. Meyerson Symphony Center—both 400 years

and features in national and international magazines.

This amalgamation of a house—one can very much feel the cozier, more compressed Dilbeck house inside the bigger, bolder wrap that Woo gave it—was the first one that the Vrooms saw when they went hunting. Loved ones thought they were nuts; it was not functional for a young family, they said. One friend, seeing photos in an email, said to Bunky, “You bought an L.A. Fitness?” But the unconventional architecture, abundant light, and calming views appealed to them. “It was bright, airy, and clean—a happy house,” says Anne. Her husband agrees: “It felt like a beach house, but in University Park.” They especially liked that the L-shape design made almost any room visible from almost any other room—perfect for keeping tabs on busy daughter Ellie, 12, and rambunctious twins, Sabine and Sloane, 3. But renovations following Woo’s ownership had disrupted some of the home’s integration, and the place needed some modifications.

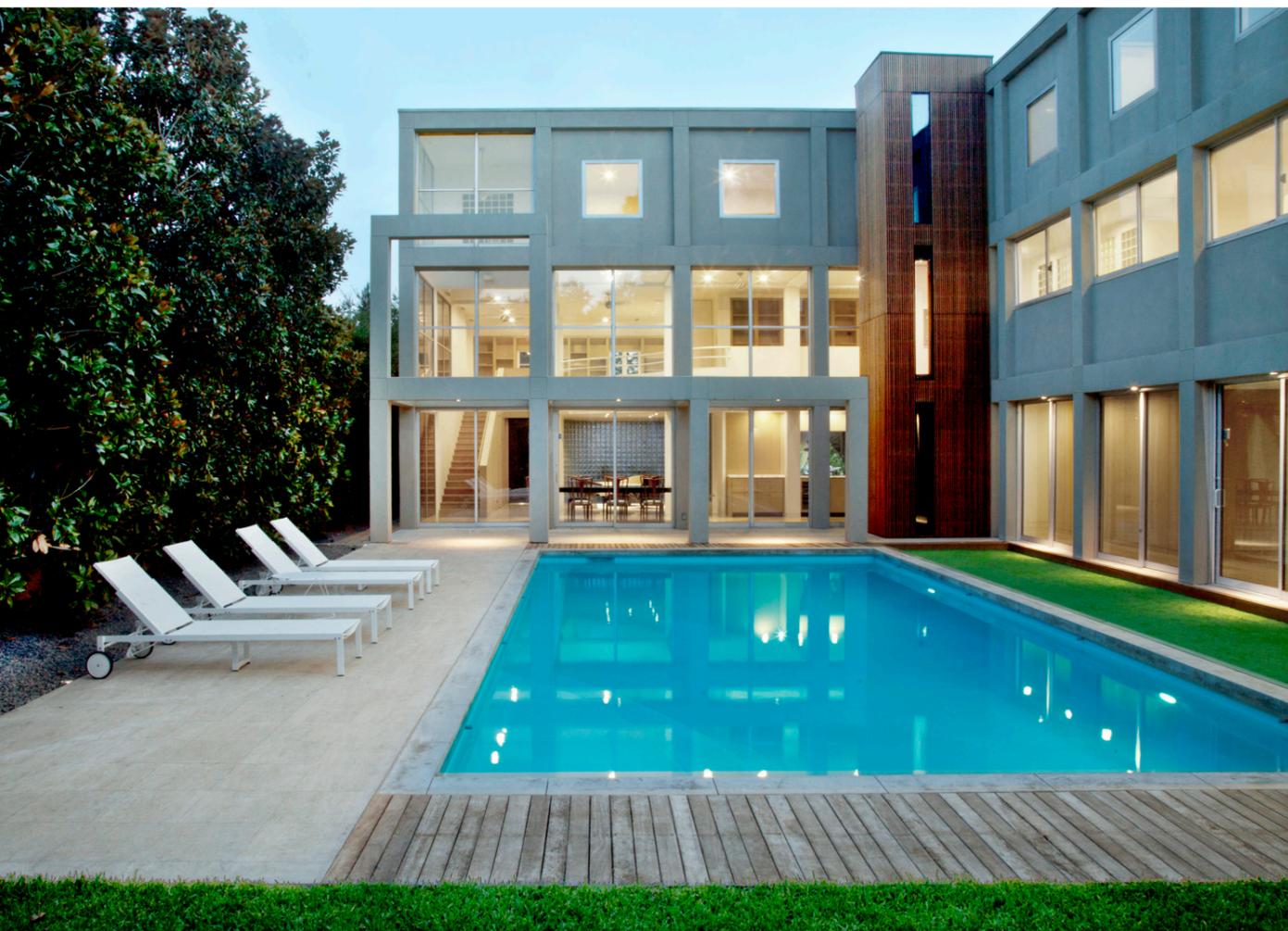
away in spirit from the comfortable Colonial the Woos had just purchased. But its large lot and what Woo called “the biggest red oak tree in the neighborhood” sealed the deal. In time, Woo devised a makeover that would not only triple the house’s size but transform it.

He designed a large, glassy, three-story L-shape that snuggled up to the Dilbeck house along the L’s shorter stroke. Built in 1982, the airy structure added living areas, a dining space, a master suite, more bedrooms, and a garage—rather Mondrian in its motif of grids, especially the three-dimensional Sheetrock that crisscrosses through one vast area. The addition included a two-story office for Woo, accessible from the outside for clients and employees and from the inside through a pivoting bookcase in the master bedroom. A swimming pool completed the composition, visible from virtually every space indoors. “It’s like living in the country,” Woo says of the vistas of water and trees.

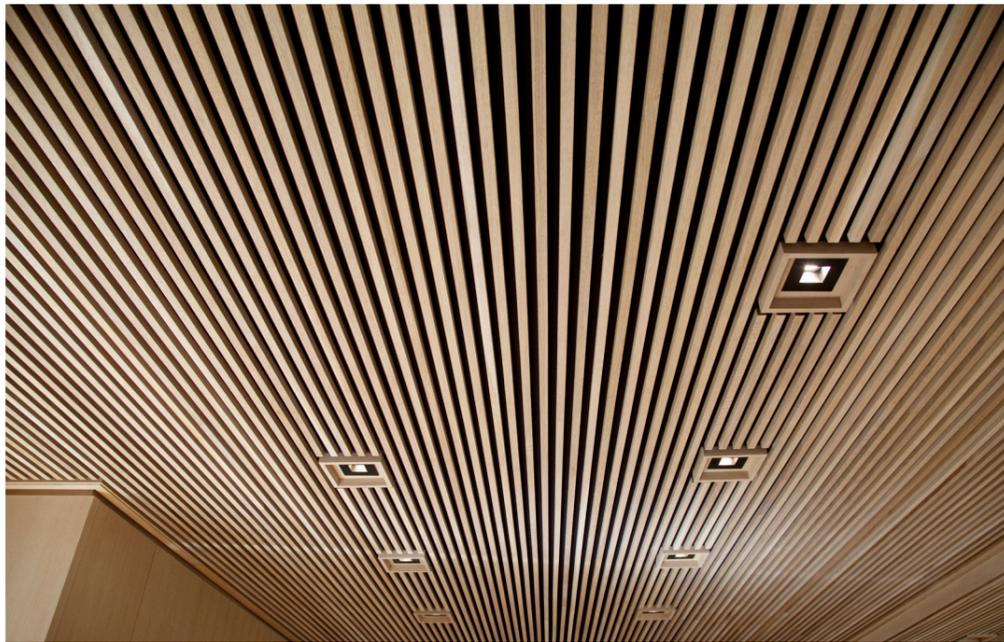
The renovations “raised a lot of eyebrows during construction,” he says, for its size and no doubt its bravado. However, Woo purposely kept the scale of the Dilbeck house intact from the front “to pay respect to the traditional houses” in the neighborhood. The sleek house got another kind of attention, too—architecture awards

Enter Welch, the undisputed master of the clean-but-comfortable Texas house. The Vrooms’ priorities: trade the brown kitchen for a white one and open up some of the second floor, more like Woo’s floorplan. “That was supposed to be it,” Bunky says, laughing. Welch was fine with Woo’s powerful architecture: “I felt the work we did should not be a glaring face-lift.” He set about unifying and refining the entire composition with help from Scott Marek of Marek Architecture, a former lead architect at Frank Welch & Associates. The changes ranged from major to minor. Welch’s signature white-oak paneling and ceilings—parallel strips of white oak with precise gaps between each one; a new, white-oak kitchen with a stunner of a bar top in creamy Brazilian quartzite; new wiring; new lights; new home automation throughout; a new pool; a bocce-ball court alongside it; new landscaping; and even an exterior elevator wrapped in Welch’s signature stick pattern in ipe wood. The reinvention of these spaces helped to improve the flow throughout. A transitional space was transformed

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this page: (top, right) The fish tank, amended to better frame the windows, can be seen from the dining and kitchen areas. (left) Family-friendly features, such as the bocce-ball court, make this high-concept home a livable space for the group of five. **opposite page:** Woo’s L-shaped redesign makes the pool visible from essentially every other point inside the house, which the Vrooms love, especially with small children around to enjoy it.



this page: For the renovation, Welch used his signature white-oak wood throughout the house, including the stairwell. Welch enlisted Scott Marek of Marek Architecture to help him with the updates. Marek was formerly a lead architect at Welch & Associates.

opposite page: (top right) The updated kitchen area features Brazilian quartzite bar tops. (bottom right) Welch used his preferred white oak again on the ceiling, installing parallel strips with precise gaps in between.

2016

“The biggest challenge for me, as always, was to leave no design fingerprint on the structure and treat it with respect.”

RENOVATION ARCHITECT FRANK WELCH



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into a dining space; a kitchen window became a door to the outside world; a master-suite sitting area became a roomy closet; and a floor-to-ceiling divider wall was traded for a low, white-oak TV/stereo cabinet. The view from the bed in the master bedroom is now nothing but trees and sky. And an oversized, double-sided fish tank in the wall separating the den and dining room—keeping it was a nonnegotiable for daughter Ellie—was updated and positioned to fit better with the house’s front windows, echoing Dilbeck’s original alignment.

All in all, the remodeling took two years—two and a half, counting the planning time. But how does one furnish such a challenging masterpiece? Anne Clayton called on longtime friend Ashley Tripplehorn Hunt of Tripplehorn Hunt Interiors. The more time Hunt spent considering the window-laden house, the more she felt its furnishings should become the art. “It was about finding furniture and pieces that were sort of sculptural and had an artistic quality to them,” she explained. Hunt gathered showstoppers such as a bronze coffee table by Philip and Kelvin LaVerne with a complex image of muses and goddesses etched on top, a wildly curvaceous Vladimir Kagan lounge chair, and a custom Parsons table in the main dining space lacquered in navy blue, surrounded by stylized chairs by Italian designer Osvaldo Borsani. Like the house’s architecture, Hunt played straight lines against curves and hard surfaces against soft.

The whole house now sings thanks to Welch’s enhancement to Woo’s 1980s airy, bold addition to the classic 1930s Dilbeck Colonial. Reflections of green magnolia trees ripple in the swimming pool’s azure water. Sloane and Sabine run zigzags down the long halls. And Ellie watches exotic fish dip and dive in her new tank. One might call it a well-orchestrated architectural symphony—the striking accompaniment that frames the story of one family’s life. **D**