

THE FOURTH REMODEL OF THIS OLD BRAESWOOD HOUSE HAD TO ENCLOSE A DANCE DECK FOR SWING DANCING, ADD A POOL AND POOL HOUSE, OPEN UP THE GROUND FLOOR VISUALLY TO THE OUTSIDE, UPDATE THE KITCHEN AND REDO THE SECOND-FLOOR BEDROOMS

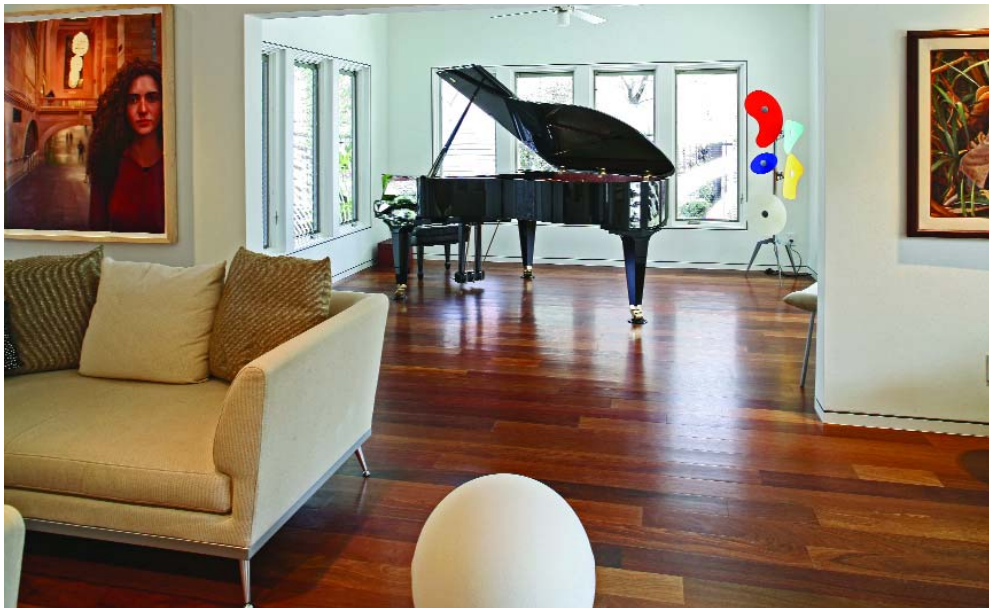
# One Swinging House

*The back yard of the Steves house after the fourth remodel; to the left is the main house. Downstairs, the den, breakfast room and kitchen have a clear view of the new zero-edge pool. To the right of the main house can be seen the dance hall and bath tower. At right is the guesthouse with pool table and antique toy collection on the ground floor.*

BY LINDA BARTH • PHOTOGRAPHY BY LUIS DE SANTOS

Buddy Steves' tastes have changed since the 1970s, but his address has not. He lives in Old Braeswood, not far from South Braeswood where he grew up. He's not the moving sort. When he needs or wants to change his environment, he remodels his house.

ONE SWINGING HOUSE



**ABOVE:** Before renovation, the walls of the kitchen had no view of the back yard. A pantry once was located where the kitchen sink is now. Breux gutted the old kitchen and specified no upper cabinets, a trade mark of her kitchen design. "The kitchen looks bigger and you enjoy the light better," she says. Cabinets and island are by Bulthaup.

**LEFT:** The nook off the living room has a grand piano that is played by Rowena and one of her sons.

**OPPOSITE:** The dance hall was once an open-air dance deck over the garage. The room was enclosed and air-conditioned (those are AC blowers on the stairs). Floors in this room and throughout the house are Brazilian chestnut. The ceiling is a special sound-absorbing acoustic paneling in cherrywood from Spain. Breux found it at a European furniture fair.





He bought his house in 1978 and spent 20 months taking it down to the studs in Remodel No. 1. The footprint of the original house built in 1928 is a 2,000-square-foot rectangle. "I liked the neighborhood and size of the lot," says Buddy. But he needed more space for bathrooms, closets and a kitchen, so he added two 14-by-16-foot two-story wings to the north side of the house with a deck in between. He also built a two-car garage and added a dance deck above it.

In 1983, he added dormer windows to the dance deck and redid the roof in concrete tile. In 1991, when Buddy and Rowena were married and expecting their first child, Remodel No. 3 with builder Joe Williams (who'd done the first two remodels) and architect Greg Harper added a glass-curtain wall to enclose the two additions created in 1978. Among other details, a catwalk was added to the newly enclosed two-story space.

Then in 2000, Buddy and Rowena decided their home needed a newer, brighter look. They stepped into Ligne Roset and met designer Anne Breux, who was working for the store at the time. Breux sold them two purple and two orange chairs for the breakfast room and suggested they replace some of their antiques and traditional furniture with more contemporary lines. The couple eventually replaced all the furniture in their living and family rooms.

The seeds of Remodel No. 4 were sewn when Richard Neel, an architect friend of the couple, observed the house had 72 windows, but you were never drawn to look outside. "We had replaced the walls with windows," Buddy says, "but the focus in every room was in toward the core of the house. Your back was to the windows." And so began Remodel No. 4. Rowena and Buddy bought a smaller

house across the street to live in for the 2 1/2 years their house was being redone for the fourth and, they say, final time.

#### REMODEL NO. 4

The remodeling project began in earnest in 2001 when they attended the American Institute of Architects-Houston home tour and met architect Rodney Collins at a home he had designed. The Steveses and Breux met with Collins, and he was hired for the remodeling project.

The house had to be suitable for entertaining, everyone agreed.

"Growing up in Braeswood, our house was always the party house," Buddy says, "and Rowena's was, too."

"On the east side [of Houston]," Rowena explains, "we were the only one with a swimming pool."

They wanted a house where their sons' friends would enjoy hanging out. And they wanted a nice place to dance. The couple are avid swing and folk dancers and occasionally host their swing dance club, with live band, on the dance deck above the garage. They wanted to enclose the space and add air conditioning because it was too warm to use during Houston's summer months. They also needed an extra bathroom for their dance events.

Another important goal was to open up the kitchen and family room visually to the back yard. The Steveses wanted a larger, brighter, more functional kitchen. "It was a one-butt kitchen," says Rowena, with a smile. The galley-like space was more a hallway than a kitchen and its one small window opened into a dark passageway.

## ONE SWINGING HOUSE



**ABOVE:** *In the new master bath, seamless terrazzo means grout lines don't need cleaning.*

**LEFT:** *Collins chose a special system of modern steps to ascend to one of the boy's lofts. By stealing the attic space above the boys' bedrooms, he was able to create lofts for them, doubling their living space.*



Breux wanted as much glass in the kitchen as possible, so walls came down. The exterior "walls" are now cabinet space in the lower half and glass windows in the upper half. "I wanted no upper cabinets," says Breux. That's a trademark of her kitchen designs for her clients. "The kitchen looks bigger and you enjoy the light better." A Bulthaup kitchen system of cabinets, appliances and a large stainless steel island were installed.

The new design actually gained the Steveses more storage space. "We have sacrificed nothing in functionality," Rowena says.

### THE POOL

Buddy and Rowena wanted a large pool for swimming, and Rowena wanted to make sure that both kids and adults could play in the pool, so there is a shallower part for children.

With the pool came the idea for a pool house, a fun place where Buddy could showcase his collection of antique toys and pinball machines. The second story of the pool house could serve as a guest room.

"Rowena wanted to stand at her kitchen sink and look at her yard," Collins says. "She wanted to see as much landscaping as possible. The guesthouse is designed to be transparent so it doesn't interrupt all that landscaping."

To make the pool/guesthouse more transparent, Collins designed a hanging cantilever structure that would allow as much glass as possible. For some of the inside walls he used Profilit, an innovative glass product from Europe. Profilit cast-glass panels made from recycled glass hold their own weight and can be lit with fiber optic lighting.





*Now the breakfast room is open to the kitchen and family room. "We spend about 90 percent of our time in this space," says Rowena.*



*Above: Stairway leading to dance deck. At right is the bath tower. Left: The medieval-looking vaulted passageway from the front yard to the back yard is clad in Virginia granite. "We thought it perfect to do a passage from the medieval 12th century to the 21st century," says Breux. Lighting design is by Lighting Unlimited. The gate depicting swing dancers is by Larry Morris of Alexandria, Va.*

"We custom made our own aluminum channels for this glass," says Collins, "and coordinated it with Lighting Unlimited to light 4 feet on either end [of the glass panel] and make walls glow using fiber optics."

Between the pool house and the second-story dance deck, they decided to add a narrow two-story structure that became known as the bath tower. Upstairs, the bath tower, which includes a bathroom and changing room, would connect via a deck to the ballroom. Downstairs in the bath tower, Buddy wanted a sauna.

"This is Houston," Collins told him. "Why do you need a sauna? Just open the door and go outside." Buddy persevered and got his sauna.

**FUNCTIONAL DETAILS**

The boys' bedrooms in the main house retained their same footprint, but the original ceilings were eliminated and the attic space was used to create lofts,

which doubled the boys' living spaces. One son has an auxiliary space next to his bedroom to hold his drum set. Shoji screens made of thin white Plexiglas separate the lots from the downstairs and its two-story space.

The master suite makes use of Shoji screens, too, to separate the bedroom from the adjacent library, closets and master bath suite.

"The shoji screen [idea] was Buddy and Rodney dreaming together," Rowena says. "Rodney thinks outside the box. Buddy never knew there was supposed to be a box."

The dark red brick exterior of the house had to be replaced. Buddy and Rowena chose a light gold and silver-gray Virginia granite cut in narrow, elongated pieces.

Buddy and Rowena wanted a separate entrance to their back yard so guests would not have to walk through their house to get to the guesthouse and pool. Breux and Collins came up with the idea of a vaulted tunnel clad in more of that Virginia granite. Lighting Unlimited designed the LED lighting to highlight the granite in the passageway.

**CHANGING AESTHETICS**

Interiors of the house have changed dramatically since Remodel No. 1 in the 1970s when the house was filled with antiques. Buddy had lived in Philadelphia and Virginia when going to graduate school. "Between Pennsylvania Dutch and Appalachia, we had quite a collection of dry sinks, pie safes, jelly cabinets and cradles and chairs," he says.

But the seeds of modernism had been sown in his consciousness in the 1960s when he attended the University of St. Thomas and took art





history classes from Dominique de Menil. Occasionally she would hold art sales for her students. At one sale, Buddy recalls, there were several signed lithographs of an Elizabeth Taylor portrait by Andy Warhol. He paid \$10 for his. "I could've bought two or three," he says with a chuckle. "I thought one would be good."

"I have always been the more contemporary modernist," says Rowena, whose grew up in a more contemporary home in southeast Houston with mid-century modern furniture.

The vintage and antique furniture Buddy collected earlier in his life — American primitives and Mission-style furniture — always had clean lines, though. "Buddy thought he didn't like contemporary furniture," Rowena says, "but he always has been an orderly person. The contemporary clean lines fit with that sense of order."

She and Breux nudged Buddy towards a more modern style. "If the wife says, 'No,' you have conflict," Rowena says. "When the designer says, 'No,' you say, 'Maybe.' I've always said an interior designer is the cheapest form of marital counseling."

Says Breux, "The remodel was for them a complete discovery of modern design and architecture. It's so different from what they had before. Their house was an eclectic mix of styles."

"As far as design goes," says Buddy, "Rodney managed to take three or four remodels and make it look like one project. He did a brilliant job of uniting the look of the house from the perspective of an architect."

Will there be more remodels? "We're done," Buddy says.



*Second-story guest room in pool house*

## RESOURCES

**Rodney Collins**  
**COLLINS ARCHITECTS**  
 713.522.4220

**Builder**  
**DOVETAIL BUILDERS**  
 713.665.0200

**Design**  
**ANNE BREUX**  
 713.301.0143

**Lighting Design**  
**LIGHTING UNLIMITED**  
 4211 Richmond Ave.  
 713.626.4025

**Pool**  
**STAR POOLS**  
 4808-B Dacoma  
 713.688.7827