

pushing boundaries



INTERIOR DESIGN BY AARON RAMBO
ARCHITECTURE BY REAGAN ANDRE ARCHITECTURE

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Opening pages: For a new Houston home owned by his business partner, Ruth Davis, interior designer Aaron Rambo chose a Ligne Roset table, Saarinen arm chairs, and a nineteenth-century Biedermeier chair upholstered with Holland & Sherry wool. These pages: The great room's mid-century French settees are upholstered with Zoffany velvet. The blue chairs are from the Catbird Collection, upholstered with a Peter Dunham linen. The custom sofa uses a Pierre Frey fabric. Walls are painted in Benjamin Moore's Cloud Cover.



Long before the blueprints were drawn for a Houston home, designer Aaron Rambo had plans of his own for the interiors

The building lot was chosen and the homeowners had begun to think about the architecture of their new house, but already interior designer Aaron Rambo had been commissioned for the job.

His client, Ruth Davis, is also his business partner. Rambo and she are co-owners of FOUND, a trend-setting Houston home-décor boutique, noted for its novel mix of period antiques and repurposed industrial finds, and so it made sense that the two partners in business would work together off site, too. “Ruth put an incredible amount of trust in the vision, in the aesthetic, and in me,” says Rambo, whose talent, creativity, and the years of passion he poured into this project are now evident.

Like many couples whose children are grown, Ruth and Neill Davis, longtime Houston residents, planned to simplify and consolidate after their two daughters graduated and moved out on their own. They sold their traditional-style home and most of its contents as they searched for the right building lot — and for an architect to synthesize their ideas for a new, contemporary-style home that they would construct.

“We’re empty nesters and didn’t want a huge home,” says Davis, “but Neill and I wanted it to be comfortable and livable, with flexible, open spaces for entertaining.”

Once Davis and her husband had settled on a building lot in the venerable River Oaks neighborhood and secured Rambo as the interior designer, she hired architect Andre De Jean of Houston’s Reagan + Andre Architecture. His role was to develop a modern aesthetic for the design of a structure that would blend seamlessly into the

neighborhood, one defined by its stock of traditional period homes.

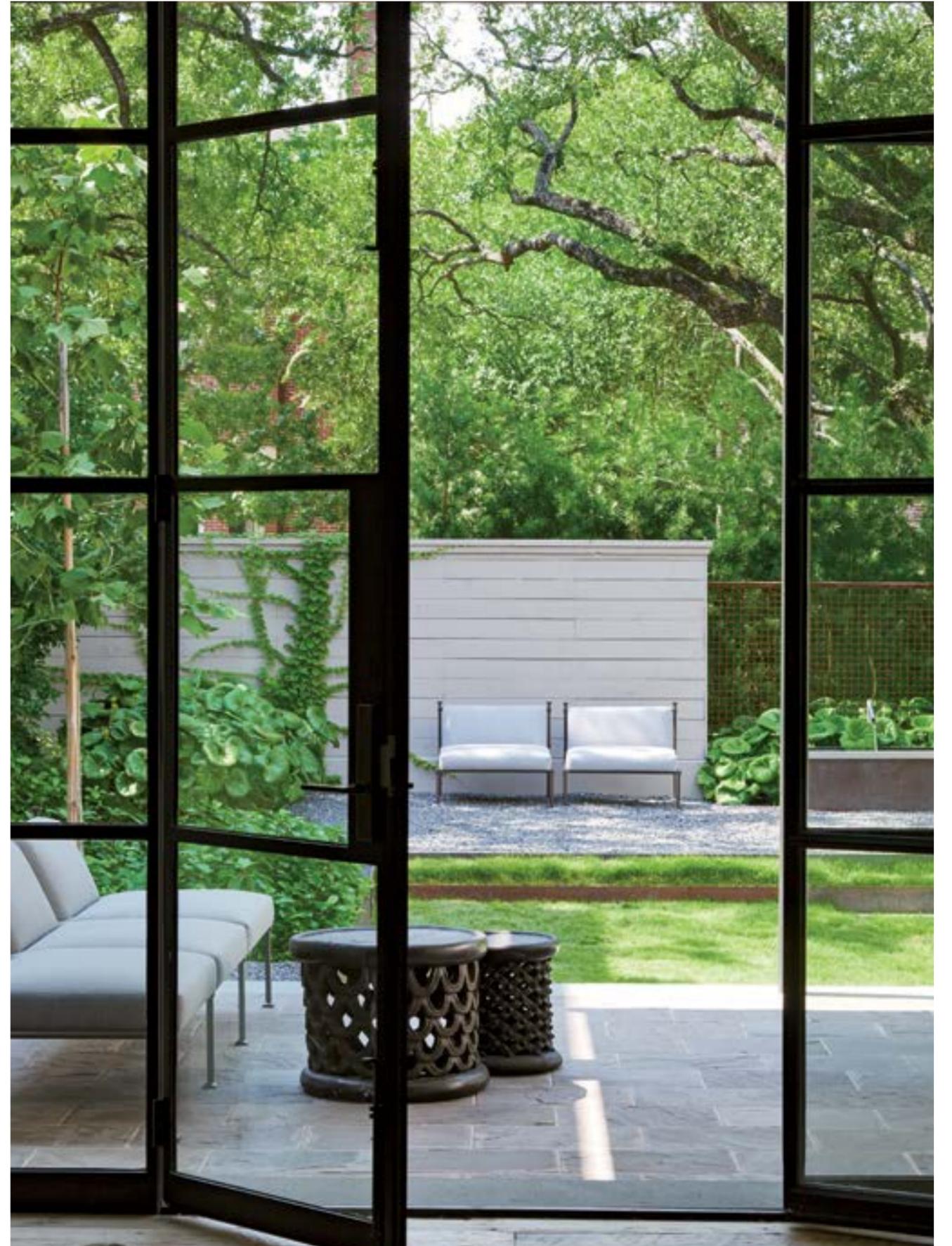
De Jean and Rambo were inextricably linked from the earliest design phase. “There were a lot of ideas Aaron wanted to express while hiding the structural elements that made them possible — and in several locations we put steel behind the wall to support some of the fascinating art he found for the interiors,” says De Jean. “What a fun process it was to collaborate with Aaron to make all these elements come together so cohesively. He’s very specific and detail oriented, which is why we got along so well.” As Davis adds, “It was a true collaboration among the three parties — interior designer, architect, and homeowner — all the way to the finish line.”

Some of Rambo’s decorative finds required special engineering, as with the eighteenth-century stone column tops he discovered while rummaging through a salvage yard in the south of France. These architectural fragments — each the weight of a baby grand piano — required careful interior structural supports. “That solution was a sort of Donald Judd inspiration,” Rambo says, referencing the late minimalist sculptor noted for his carefully balanced creations. “Much of Ruth and Neill’s art

Left: A sweeping arc sofa defines much of the room referred to as the salon. A circa-1790 wood-and-gilt armchair is upholstered with Jerry Pair Leather. A nineteenth-century gilt frame, positioned on a custom stand, displays an Italian religious scene.



This page: A custom-designed red onyx sink is used in a downstairs powder room. The Louis XIV giltwood mirror is set with mercury glass. Right: Vintage French furniture is used in the backyard and upholstered with fabric from Perennials. African drums serve as coffee tables.





This page: The headboard in the master suite uses an oyster-hued Groundworks velvet. Woven bed cover is from Irving & Morrison. Table lamp is vintage Murano glass. A Verellen chair is upholstered with stone linen. Right: The master closet features a circa-1900 glass and brass vitrine from a French jewelry shop. The wall covering is de Gournay and the woven Turkish rug is circa 1940.



is bold and polished, and I really liked the juxtaposition of these timeworn slabs of stone flecked with lichen and moss that might even still be growing.” Two of them hang now as artworks in the home’s dining area. Art was definitely one of Rambo’s priorities, so much so that the artworks he chose dictated much of the interior and exterior design of the home.

As for the architecture, De Jean was intent on honoring the traditional home designs found in River Oaks, one of the city’s most picturesque and carefully planned developments, dating from the 1920s. While De Jean’s design was contemporary in feel, he was sensitive to the structure blending in with the neighboring houses. His use of brick and the warmth of slurry helped accomplish this goal. High ceilings, an abundance of natural light, and clean interior trim details paired with floors of reclaimed planks and polished concrete have combined to create a gallery-like environment — and a canvas for Rambo’s creativity. But De Jean was also challenged to accommodate and incorporate items Rambo and Davis selected for the home during their buying trips to Europe for FOUND. “Going to France with Aaron and personally buying some of the wonderful antiques for the home was probably the highlight and the most fun part of the process,” says Davis.

On one buying trip, Rambo found a large box of French brass hardware. He didn’t know how he would use it, but he sent it home to Houston. Over the next weeks and months, Rambo worked to incorporate these unusual hinges and screws, handles and thresholds throughout the house. The result is a new home that

doesn’t feel brand new, and while the knobs may not always match, they — along with the other antiques — lend the house great warmth.

Another of Rambo’s inspirations, to which De Jean responded structurally, involved a beautifully veined slab of red onyx. Rambo had it turned into a powder-room sink and he worked out the mechanics of free floating it with metal bars attached to the beams of the house. “That monolithic slab of onyx floating in front of the window is so sensational,” says Rambo, “that the room didn’t need anything else but an extraordinary Louis XVI mirror.” From inception, it was Rambo’s and Davis’s designs and choice of décor that determined the very architecture of the home.

“I thought about that house night and day for three years,” says Rambo. “I wanted to extend the aesthetic of the store and help create a home for Ruth and Neill that reflected their sensibilities in a different medium. Doing it from the ground up, we were buying furniture for two years based on Andre’s plans, and when we began installing the house, none of the pieces had ever been there and none of them had ever been in one place. We were putting it all together for the first time. To look that effortless took three years of effort.”

Davis is well aware of Rambo’s unwavering attention to every detail he included and how each is revealed throughout the rooms he fashioned. “Open a door and you’ll see a surprising color in a powder room or coat closet, or a beautiful piece of hardware,” she says. “There’s some beautiful de Gournay wallpaper in the master closet, which is a bit of private luxury, and all these touches make the house very special.” ■

“We don’t do the typical; we’re always asking for innovative. Just because something is difficult doesn’t mean it can’t be done.”

— Aaron Rambo

