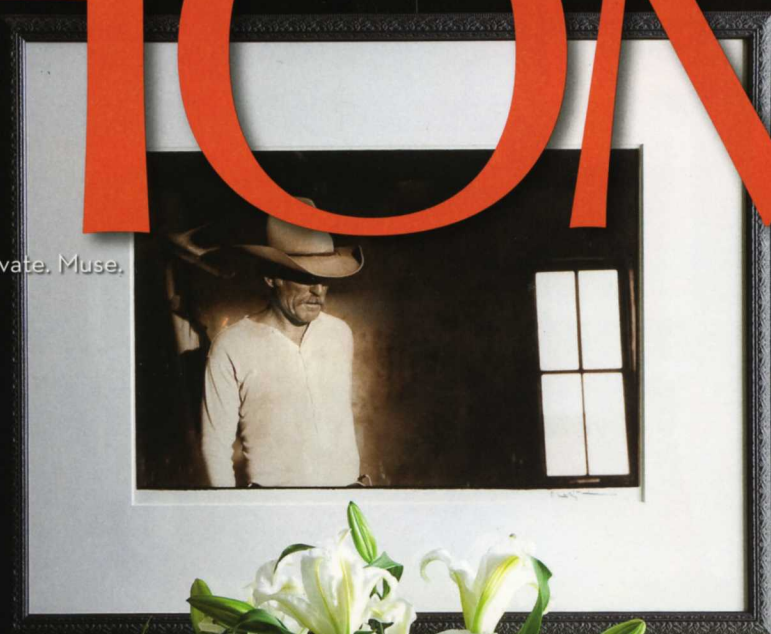


# AUSTIN MONTHLY HOME

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# The Big Bang Theory

Little things mean a lot in the renovation of a small house with major ideas

BY DANA FRANK / PHOTOGRAPHY BY GREG HURSLEY



Michael Griffin was a renter in his favorite South Austin neighborhood, just east of South Congress Avenue. Renting a home gave the busy executive time to get to know the area and to develop a good idea about the dream house he hoped to find nearby. “I wanted a nice place that wasn’t overwhelming,” he says. The house would have vintage charm, too, and would serve as sanctuary from Griffin’s busy schedule as founder and CTO of Adlucent, an internet marketing firm. Being on hand paid off: A 1930s two-bedroom, one-bath bungalow just a few blocks from where Griffin was renting came on the market. Fortunately, Griffin is used to being a visionary in his work, so nothing about the gloomy house deterred him—not even the dark earth-tone paint scheme, awnings that cast a pall over the interiors, and solid front and back doors that impeded any relationship between the indoors and outdoors.

Griffin bought the house in September 2009 and was eager to move in by Christmas. He called the two people he knew who would be able to deliver

on such short notice: architect Patrick Ousey of FAB Architecture and Royce Flournoy, president of Texas Construction. Ousey had done award-winning work on Griffin’s offices, and Flournoy knew the client socially. Griffin has a clean and modern aesthetic, but he also wanted to respect the dwelling’s original craftsmanship. “The philosophy of the house,” notes Griffin, “became ‘modern and edgy, but maintaining the historic charm.’”

The first step, all agreed, was to eliminate an accumulation of many years’ worth of “improvements,” says Flournoy. “We had to undo the bad work and get it right.” Adds Ousey: “We also wanted to brighten things up.” The architect proposed to accomplish that by “opening the home to the outdoors in small ways.” That would be easy to do in the 1,200-square-foot house, since the front door opens directly into the living room, which opens to the dining room and a view of the backyard through the back door. The kitchen is to the left of the dining room. A central hallway divides the public rooms from a master bedroom and guest

A 1930s-era bungalow was dark and gloomy until Michael Griffin bought it. He asked architect Patrick Ousey and builder Royce Flournoy to give the house a modern aesthetic while keeping its original charm.

room, with a bathroom in between. The footprint of the house would remain the same, but in such a compact dwelling even small changes have a big impact. “We all understood this project wasn’t going to be just a coat of paint,” Flournoy says.

Ousey reimaged the dark cottage into an ethereal domain. That effect was accomplished by refinishing honey-colored oak floors with a dark walnut stain to add depth and by painting all the walls and ceilings white. Ousey used Pittsburgh Paint’s “Gypsum,” an ambiguous color that shifts from bright to moody and quiet, depending on the light. Walls and ceiling of the interior hall were painted charcoal blue-black. The effect is dramatic: The surrounding white rooms seem to expand from the dark hall.

Ousey and Flournoy moved no walls in this renovation. “We considered taking down the wall between the kitchen and the dining room,” says Griffin, “but then the resulting room would have been disproportionate.” In addition, the kitchen kept its aluminum countertops and lower cabinets (“nice thirties metal prefab,” as Ousey calls them) while Flournoy ripped out the upper cabinets and finished the walls with open shelving and oversized subway tiles that provide sheen.

Even though Griffin was in Argentina during most of the renovation, communication between architect, builder and client was easy. In fact, Ousey and Flournoy are now collaborating on two projects, including Flournoy’s own home. “We had a good back and forth,” Griffin says. The communication shows in the results. With a gentle touch and consideration for the cottage’s history, Ousey and Flournoy came through for their client. “I love the quiet energy,” Griffin says about his new house in his old neighborhood. “It’s all about the space and how it feels.” amh

**1** Metal prefab cabinets are original to the kitchen. **2** The house is now open to the outdoors, with glass doors front and back. **3** Walls throughout are painted Pittsburgh Paint’s “Gypsum”; floors are stained dark.

