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JUNE 2005

Made *in the* Shade

Lake home in Sugar Land designed for outdoor living

THE WONDERS OF WICKER

ENERGY-EFFICIENT WINDOWS

LAWN TOOLS FOR DAD

LIVING ABOVE A GALLERY

PICNIC RECIPES

in the spotlight:

CHANGE THE LOOK OF YOUR HOME WITH ARTISTIC FIREPLACE SURROUNDS

AT THE TOP

TWO UPPER FLOORS OF THE NEW DE SANTOS GALLERY PROVIDE TEMPORARY CONTEMPORARY LIVING QUARTERS



The entry to the living quarters is located at the back of the gallery, shown here.

BY LINDA BARTH • PHOTOGRAPHY BY HESTER + HARDAWAY





THIS PAGE:

TOP: Yellow pine floors warm the architecture of the second-floor studio, which also serves as a living room .

BOTTOM: The kitchen is very basic. Some of the plain wooden cabinets are stained colors for fun and visual interest.

OPPOSITE PAGE:

TOP LEFT: A cantilevered canopy prominently emphasizes the entry to the De Santos Gallery. The area under the canopy is "that buffer (space) where most of the best things happen," says architect Fernando Brave.

TOP RIGHT: Glass walls on the bridge from the studio to the kitchen allow a view of the gallery entrance below.

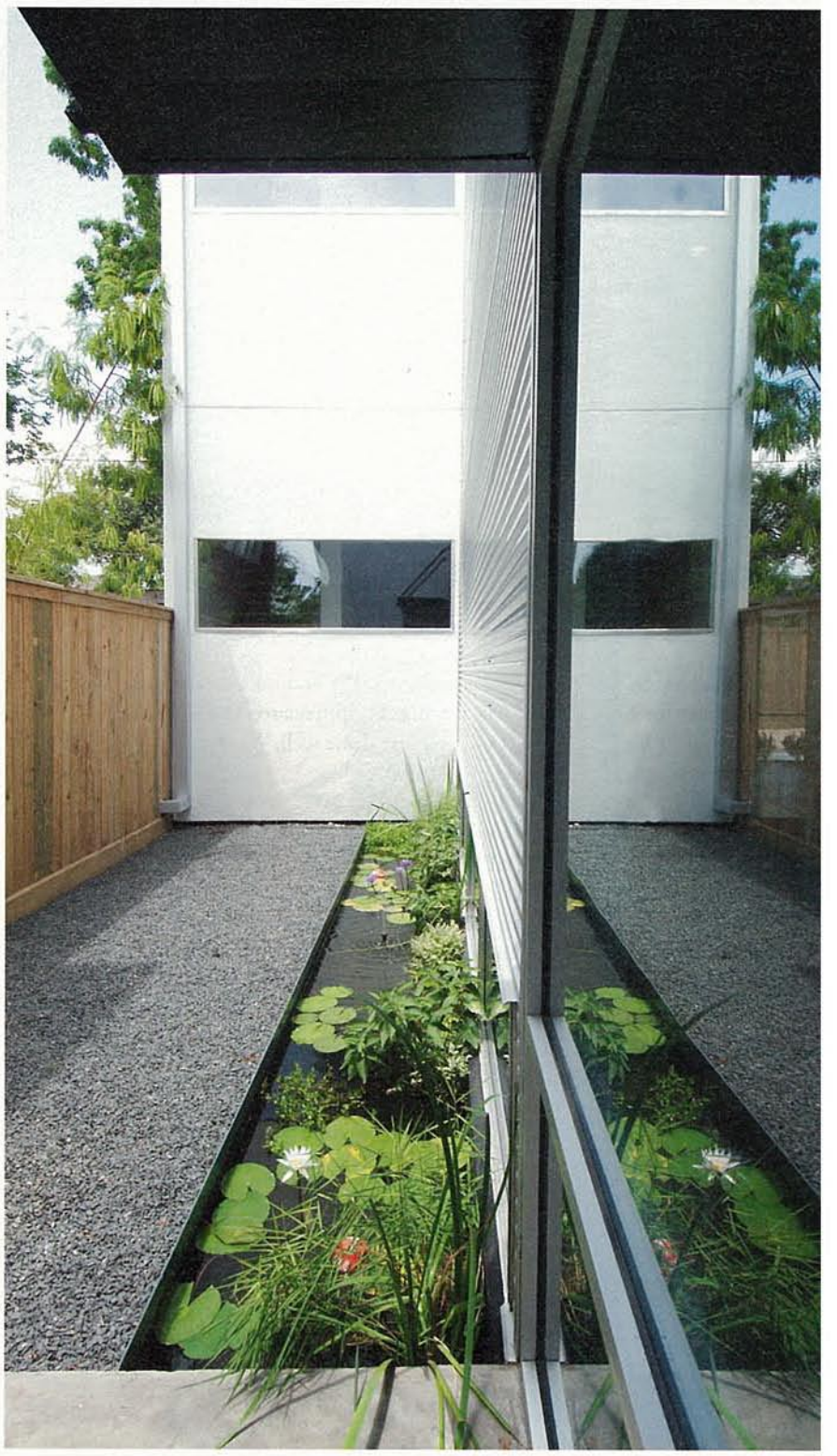
BOTTOM LEFT: A floor-level window in the stairwell leading to the studio and living quarters frames a view of the fish pond.

BOTTOM RIGHT: The fish pond by Nelson Water Gardens & Nursery is a self-sustaining ecosystem; the fish never have to be fed.









Amid the bustling taquerias, pizzerias and 1960s garden-apartment complexes on Richmond Avenue in the Montrose area, a new building of calm elegance has brought a clean, fresh aesthetic to this lively intown street. The subtle 4,200 square-foot De Santos Gallery, set on the west side of its lot, is careful not to overwhelm its outdoor space. Its western siting leaves plenty of room for eastern morning light to filter through windows and illuminate the building's various levels. A gravel drive on the east side extends to the backyard, where it lets moisture trickle down to the roots of a treasured pecan tree.

Dr. Luis De Santos, a radiologist at the Texas Medical Center, commissioned Fernando Brave, AIA, of Brave/Architecture in Houston to design his gallery building because he needed more space for his hobby and lifelong passion — fine-art photography. He had been renting a studio in a cramped office on Montrose Boulevard when he and his wife, Gemma De Santos, decided to build a new gallery suitable for exhibiting photographic works from around the world.

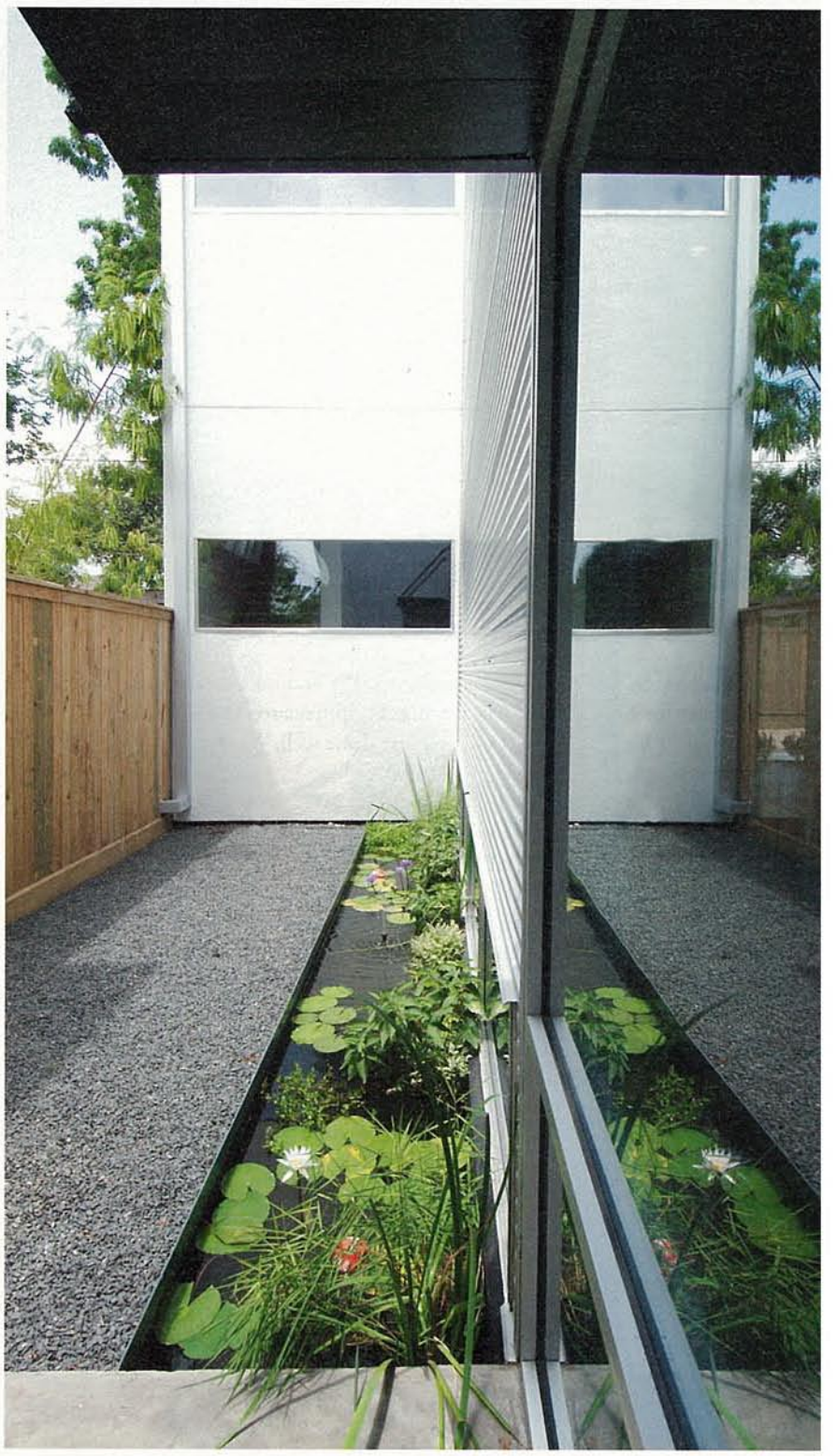
Above the gallery, they wanted a private studio, work space and dark room for Dr. De Santos. Then, they decided why not add a bath, small kitchen and bedroom where he could stay after working late into the night on his photography projects? The living space also could house visiting photographers exhibiting at the gallery.

"The De Santoses were very specific about the functions they wanted the building to serve," says Brave, "but they never wanted to drive the architecture of the building. They said, 'I trust you. Do whatever you think.' That is a dream client."









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De Santos, whose brother is a professor of architecture in Spain, sought out Brave for his gallery design because he appreciated Brave's modern aesthetic. "I like all forms of architecture done well," De Santos says, "but modern is my cup of tea."

ONE BUILDING, TWO USES

The building is permitted as two separate components: The first floor, with gallery and office, is commercial; the second and third floors are residential. While they are connected to the gallery by an internal stairwell, the upper two floors can work independently from the gallery, allowing each area to be operated by a different tenant, if needed.

The building's front entry, which leads directly into the commercial gallery, is its most prominent architectural detail. With a cantilevered black canopy and bold black louvers on the second- and third-story windows above, the entry announces the importance of passage into the building. "This space that's neither inside nor out is important," says Brave. "It's that buffer where most of the best things happen—the greeting, the farewell, the kiss, the mint julep under the porch."

Inside the gallery, a window low to the floor beautifully frames a fish pond outside by Nelson Water Gardens & Nursery. Alive with blooming water lilies and red and black fish, the pond is a self-sustaining ecosystem, so the fish never have to be fed. The stairwell leading up to the studio and living quarters is punctuated with windows that frame the fish pond and sculpture garden, as well.

Soft yellow pine covers the floor of the second-story studio, which also serves as the "living room" for the residential area of the building. "Sometimes people think modern architecture is cold," De Santos admits. "I think pine gives modern architecture the warmth of wood."

Interior designer Anne Breux helped the De Santoses with the furniture selection and color palette for the living spaces.

A bridge from the studio to the small kitchen has glass walls that allow a view of the gallery entry below. The kitchen is sparsely outfitted with plain wooden cabinets, some playfully stained with colors for fun and visual interest. Countertops are no-nonsense Formica.

On the third floor is the loft area with comfortable platform bed and bookshelves. One wall of the loft is floor-to-ceiling glass doors overlooking a spacious terrace that De Santos wanted for outdoor portrait photography. The minimalist terrace, serene in all-white furniture, Richard Schultz's 1966 Collection, sits only three stories above busy Richmond Avenue, but it is quiet, and offers commanding views of the Medical Center and the Galleria.

ABOVE: A wall of glass doors connects the loft to the terrace. The bed is from Ligne Rose, the spaghetti lamps, from Design Within Reach.

BELOW: Designer Anne Breux chose white furniture from Richard Schultz's 1966 Collection for the loft's serene terrace, which is meant to be used not only for relaxation but also for outdoor portrait photography.

MINIMAL DETAILING

Throughout the living quarters, the emphasis is on the volume of space, not on the materials. "I'm more interested in space than materials," says Brave. "We always like to minimize the number of materials in a project. Fewer materials provide for a better sensory experience, I think."

The walls are dry-wall construction trowelled with a gypsum finish so they have as little texture as possible. There's not a strip of molding in sight, and, of course, no wallpaper. "Why have trim and wallpaper when you can have a beautiful piece of art on the wall?" he asks.

Because there is no trim, the construction has to be plumb. "Trim and fixtures are sometimes used to cover bad workmanship," Brave says. To build in the minimalist style he likes, "Everything has to be carefully placed. Materials have to be cut right." The builder he chose for the project, Eimar Virkus of Virkus Construction, performed an exceptional job of carrying out his plans, Brave says.

CRITICAL ACCLAIM

The gallery's well-attended photographic exhibits have proven the building to be the success everyone had hoped for. And this spring, the American Institute of Architects Houston Chapter awarded Brave/Architecture the 2005 Honor Award for architecture in recognition of its design of De Santos Gallery. ■

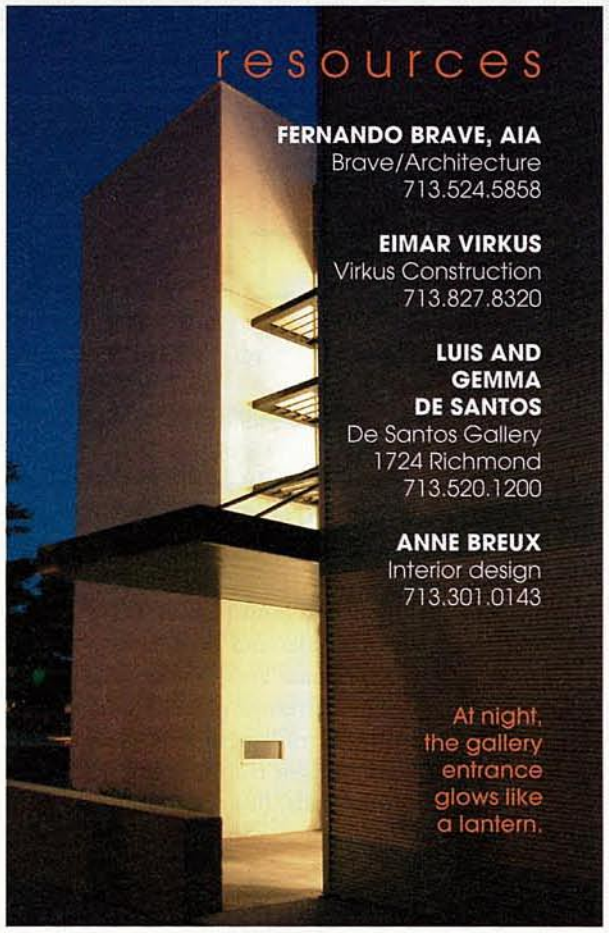
resources

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At night, the gallery entrance glows like a lantern.