

THE STATE OF THE DREAM: 40 years later

Memphis

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"I STILL
BELIEVE
THAT WE
SHALL
OVERCOME."

Martin Luther King Jr.
1929-1968



Artists in Residence

A blend of local artwork, sleek lines, and soothing tones? Just what the doctors ordered.

By Karen Shelton
Photographs by Rick Bostick

Fine art often reveals itself a bit at a time, showing the depths of its beauty and layers of interest. The same applies to the home of Memphis physicians Dr. Roger Price and Dr. Susan Murrmann Price, with its complex mixture of art and architecture.

When the couple bought the residence in 1998, it had great bones. "I fell in love with it instantly, the moment I walked in the front door," Susan recalls. I knew this was where I was supposed to be." Then she and her husband went to work, along with builder Steve Mikula, to transform the 25,000 square foot structure into the showcase it is today—modern, elegant, and perfect for entertaining.

Susan recalls that a few of the architects they originally consulted with when they bought the home wanted to change its openness. So they found one who, like them, appreciated that feature. Collaborating with Mikula, they not only expanded the size, but turned the residence into a work of art. From the sculpted staircase that seems to float just above the floor to the walls of glass doors that open onto the pool area, each highlight of the home is special unto itself, yet blends into the overall picture.

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Because they love to entertain whether it's an intimate dinner for a few friends or a benefit for the Memphis/Shelby Humane Society—the couple wanted a highly functional yet comfortable kitchen. Rather than expand the original room into an L-shape as some architects suggested, the couple went with Mikula's plan. He turned the space into an open area that curves around and opens to the back of the home. The kitchen's curvature is accented by cabinets that gradually step out around the curve, as well as the gracefully winding stone step that leads into the sitting area off the kitchen. To enhance the room's functionality, the couple added several special features—two ovens (one gas and one electric), a deep fry station, an indoor grill station, and more. The result is a stunning study in design and practicality.

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Like the kitchen, the master bedroom suite was designed around the couple's personalities and lifestyle. Located on the first floor in a newly built wing of the house, the suite subtly mixes natural elements—wood, stone, fire, and water—to provide a serene environment. The space also incorporates unusual touches, such as a tub that fills from a spout in the ceiling, and a workout room that opens directly into the top level of the backyard pool.

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“We wanted our home to be a place we love,” Susan says, “and it is definitely that. We enjoy spending time in all areas of our home. We feel comfortable here. I can’t imagine ever living anywhere else.”

While the home’s beautiful lines and eclectic elements make it spectacular, its out-of-the-ordinary details keep visitors guessing and eager to see more—details like Murano glass beads on the ceiling of the powder room, Italian glass tiles that accent the kitchen back-splash, and wall paper in the master bath with the look and feel of stone. Whimsical touches include the bride and groom featured in the downtown Memphis-themed bar back-splash created by local artist Kim McLaughlin, a happy reminder of the couple’s wedding on the Mississippi River banks; and the glass sculptured balloons that float above the grand piano in the foyer.

Reflected throughout the house is the couple’s appreciation for all kinds of art. Unpretentious and fanciful, the pieces range from black and white photographs by Jack Robinson, to a guitar mosaic by Karen “Bottle” Capps, to Asian-inspired sculpture. “We buy pieces we like,” Susan explains. “We don’t go shopping in search of a piece to fit in a certain place in our home. Instead, we buy what we enjoy and we always end up finding a place where it fits her in the house.”

Several spaces are “built around” the couple’s finds. For instance, the mantel of the living room’s limestone fireplace is supported by salvaged antique corbels that Susan discovered. The master-bath sink basins are specially crafted glass bowls mounted atop an antique Chinese noodle table—another of Susan’s finds, this one on a trip to New York – which sits in the middle of the room. The simple lines of the staircase were designed

by Mikula based on a photograph Susan saw in an old Architectural Digest. In the den is a chandelier made of European stag antlers the couple spotted while on vacation in the northeast.

To pull all their pieces together, Susan and Roger relied on interior designer Ami Austin. “They made her job really easy,” Austin says, “because Susan has great taste. And, because she and I have spent so much time together, I know what she likes.”

Even when she has to work with some of Susan’s more unusual finds, such as the Pyinsa rupa—an Asian-inspired sculpture which combines the most striking features of five different animals: the head of the lion, the antlers, ears, and legs of the deer, the body of a tail of certain fish, the wings of the Hintha bird, and the tusk and the trunk of the elephant—Ami and Susan have been able to blend various styles, periods, and colors together to create a harmonious balance.

Evident in the diverse collection is the couple’s love of Memphis and the Mid-South. Feature works by acclaimed local artists, such as Pinkney Hebert, Nancy Cheairs, and Wayne Edge. These contribute to the home’s ship, stylish, laid-back comfort.

Indeed comfort is key here. Despite its grand space, the many intricate details and thoughtfully selected accents and artwork create a welcoming environment that puts visitors at ease. “We wanted our home to be a place we love,” Susan says “and it is definitely that. We enjoy spending time in all the areas of our home. We feel comfortable here. I can’t imagine ever living anywhere else.