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Less is More

Think big, build small. Developer Alan Kagan's modern East Dallas home breaks the mold.

| By Rebecca Sherman | Photography by Justin Clemons |

Builder Alan Kagan's new contemporary house in East Dallas drew plenty of *oohs* and *ahhs* on the recent AIA Dallas Tour of Homes, and that's just what the 30-year veteran of the construction industry wanted. At 2,500 square feet, Kagan's house impresses not with size, but with innovative and luxurious use of commonly found materials and judicious use of space. "It's a great size," says Kagan, who teamed up with architect Joshua Nimmo of Nimmo American Studio, to build a house for himself that would also be a showcase for future contemporary homes he hopes to build with Nimmo and other architects. He moved in this summer.

"My take is that with everything going on in the economy and industry, people are wanting to downsize, plus or minus 2,500 square feet. You can get three bedrooms, three baths, two living areas, and kitchen and dining areas. It also gives you the options of adding a study and additional space."



OPEN DOOR POLICY

In the living room, colorful aggregate, revealed during the floor's sanding process, enlivens a subdued color palette. Vintage Saarinen table from Aguin and Aguin; Womb chair and ottoman were a vintage find; concrete bench in garden from Joel Cooner Gallery; Left: Developer Alan Kagan. The custom-designed metal front door, which opens on a pivot, was designed by Steel Salvation. Glass House made all the windows.

ART HOUSE Right: In the living room, a painting by Dutch artist Arie Van Selm hangs over a mid-20th century Italian settee; the Lucite table is from Allan Knight; the metal sculpture is by Shane Pennington. Below: View overlooking the pool into the master bedroom; the sculpture was purchased at the Nasher Sculpture Center.



After working with Nimmo to build edge, contemporary condominiums geared for young professionals on Rusk Street near downtown Dallas several years ago, Kagan identified an untapped niche in the local housing market. While there are plenty of townhouses and condominiums, “a lot of young professionals are wanting modern, affordable and sustainable single family homes that are close to urban areas, but there’s just nothing out there,” he says. Entry level homes, which Kagan builds under the name Dwellings... A Kagan Company (dwellingsakc.com), start at \$300,000 and top out at \$750,000. A design similar to the one he built for himself with the same finishes runs in the upper price range, he says. “I knew I would be living in this house, but the idea was to show potential clients what I could do; we’ve had quite a few see it already. There’s a definite trend toward modern home living in Dallas.”

Set along a leafy street several blocks from Greenville Avenue and surrounded by modestly sized older homes, Kagan’s house stands out with its clean lines and simple geometry. A large architectural metal screen obscures the building from the street, enclosing an old pecan tree and Zen garden in the front (Kagan worked in Japan for several years and always wanted one). While the exterior materials—brick and masonry—are typical, the design is not. Using solar orientation software, Nimmo and Kagan determined the best places for windows, overhangs and landscaping. The main entry is on the side of the house under a shady

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WALL TO WALL Left: The entry houses an installation of blue bricks by artist Eric McGearety and a painting by Dion Johnson.

...CONTINUED overhang, and accessed by a 10-foot, custom-made metal door. Inside, it's all about expansive spaces and cantilevered planes that provide uninterrupted views from the front to the back of the house. Interior doors are all 10 feet tall, made of solid core wood. It's a small house that feels big.

Growing up in the Preston Hollow neighborhood of Dallas, "the land of the traditional home," Kagan says, he remembers driving through other neighborhoods in the family car noticing "all these cool houses with flat roofs and gravel on them. I was taken by midcentury architecture." He aspired to be an architect, but circumstances pushed him into the business world instead. In the early '90s, he began buying, renovating, and flipping houses for a profit. In 2005, he segued into developing high-end modern spec homes, and he estimates he's built 25 since then. In most instances, he acts as the general contractor and developer on his projects, and he says a quest for perfection and a sense of style set him apart from most developers. "I'm not typical in that I have taste and not a lot of them do. I don't just build for the money, I like being involved. Clients often know what they want, but they need direction."

He also has an eye for designing killer minimal kitchens and baths. "I wanted a 'wow' master bath,"



BIRD HOUSE
 Above: The kitchen features Venetian plaster walls and fixtures from TKO and Knob Hill; the stools are Italian. The metal shelves hold three small sculptures by Stanley Bell and a bronze by Carol Peace. The papier-mâché birds were purchased in New Orleans. Left: New York artist Terry Clark painted the apples artwork and Terrance Hannum created the artwork over the Cantoni sofa; chairs are from Form; the Barcelona coffee table is from Knoll.

says Kagan, who charged Nimmo with creating a spalike, oversized room where everything except the tub and sink is hidden, and an outdoor shower is visible through the glass. The open kitchen glows with polished Venetian plaster walls and a cooktop that's lighted indirectly by means of a recessed skylight. Integrated fixtures and lack of upper cabinetry minimize visual noise.

Interior designer and friend Brant McFarlain helped Kagan purchase furniture for the home and sent a few existing pieces out to be recovered, but Kagan used restraint. "I tend to be a minimalist, the more stuff you have takes away from the beautiful architecture. Just keep it clean and simple," he says. Color comes mostly from the sanded concrete floor, which reveals the material's natural aggregate and resembles terrazzo, but with a lesser price tag. While Kagan's custom house was designed to show off his building and construction skills, the initial inspiration came from a need to house his collection of modern sculptures and paintings, much of which is by emerging artists, he says. "I also think it was just time for me to have a really cool house." ■