

THE RADAR DESIGN

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FINAL DRAFT: Sergio Chavez took on the challenge of an unusual lot to bring his own house to life.

IN THE VANGUARD *Two thirtysomething architect neighbors get their chance to play dream house by designing their own mod digs in Urban Reserve*

For two young architects, a swath of land spotted with one modernist home after another—in Dallas—is something of a find. To have the chance to design their own houses among them is a veritable thrill. “It has been my dream,” says Maria Gomez. “There is nothing better, as an architect, than to live in a home you have created.” Her neighbor, 32-year-old Sergio Chavez, agrees. “It is not common to have built your own house at our age.” But here, in a 13-acre ecologically sustainable community four miles north of White Rock Lake, nothing is.

Urban Reserve, as it is called, is the brainchild of award-winning developer Diane Cheatham, who has enlisted notable architects from across the country to conceive 50 unique homes that her company, Urban Edge Developers Ltd., is in the throes of constructing. Just east of Central Expressway and south of Forest Avenue, the neighborhood sits on natural wooded terrain that Cheatham will preserve, saving existing trees and native plants, devising a rainwater collection and irrigation system and incorporating two shared green spaces. Also, houses erected from non-toxic building materials and energy systems that are 20 percent higher in efficiency than codes require, are *de rigueur*.

“The master plan was intriguing to me,” says Gomez, 38, who joined Good Fulton & Farrell after moving from her native Colombia nine years

ago. “And the trees were very important. We had pecans, cottonwoods and elms in the footprint of the house, one 60 inches in diameter, and built around them.” One shoots up in an interior courtyard; another required a notch in an exterior wall. Gomez designed a 2,400-square-foot wood frame home with two bedrooms, kitchen and living room downstairs, and a daring open staircase that ascends to a master suite, library and west-facing deck. The house is simple and refined, with German elm kitchen cabinetry that is flush with the ceiling, white statuary marble countertops throughout, Bulthaup appliances and sealed concrete floors. The doors are few, and pocketed. “Spatially, it is designed for the way we use a house. I don’t want people hidden away,” says Gomez, who works mainly on corporate projects for her firm. She expects to move in this fall.

A 12-foot cantilever provides shade for the wall of glass on the southern exposure. Stucco and ipe, a Brazilian hardwood, make up the exterior. “Everybody is using ipe,” says Chavez.

His house across the street—there is just one road, Vanguard Way—is a smaller and more casual study, set dramatically on a surprising bit of Dallas earth. “I chose this lot knowing I’d be close to the house next door, and started sketching to see what I could do. I got a survey, but no topography, and figured out that I had a 30-foot drop.”

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THE MOD PODS *Clockwise from above:* Urban Reserve now includes six completed and occupied homes. Twenty three of the 50 lots are still available. Sergio Chavez' house, at 1,600 square feet, combines living and dining areas upstairs to maximize the forest views. Maria Gomez designed an open floor plan with cool white marble countertops and sealed concrete floors to complete the modernist treatment.



...CONTINUED "It was impossible to identify where the lot was," Gomez agrees, "with all the shrubs."

"Yes, a challenge, but doable," says Chavez, who specializes in designing sports arenas for HKS, Inc., including Pizza Hut Park in Frisco and stadiums for the Indianapolis Colts, Dallas Cowboys and soccer teams in England and Mexico (under construction). "I could fit my house into one of the concession stands," he laughs.

At 1,600 square feet, his stucco and wood trim home consolidates the living room and open kitchen upstairs, adjacent to the master bedroom. The ceiling is angled, measuring 14 feet at its highest point. On the first level, two bedrooms and two baths border a foyer of exposed concrete. In the living room, a slab hangs six feet over the cliff on the western side of the house, which welcomes abundant greenery through windows that are opened in friendly weather. Furnishings, including maple kitchen and bath cabinetry, tile carpet in the living area, light fixtures and easy furniture, all from IKEA, lend a comfortable and smart air to a home that must accommodate a 15-month-old.

While Gomez and Chavez are pioneers at Urban Reserve, this forward-thinking enclave is catching notice. "We are brainwashed [toward modernism] after five years of architecture school," says Chavez, a native of Queretara, Mexico. "Everything evolves toward modern, toward new design, experimentation. It would be nice if the trend keeps going here." Says Gomez, "Modernism is true to the materials, to function, and does not pretend to be something it isn't. I think that living in a traditional house would be difficult." ■