

DESIGN SOLUTION:

I purchased a forty year old simple salt box house ten years ago to be re-modeled for my own home. The first re-do was rough cedar covering up the existant wooden house and then punching holes for glass sliding doors and windows. The house stayed that way until five years ago when it became surrounded by three story high pseudo-Georgian monsters. (See photograph). The next design solution was a thirty-two foot high steel and stucco wall to give privacy to my back garden and house. The steel structured wall led to the steel designed stairs which make marvelous patterns in the Texas sunshine. A new glass block bathroom was added as well as a private studio for painting but mainly for my slide collection. All my lectures for the University of Houston School of Architecture are put together in this space. There is a top sun deck which was added on the fourth level on top of the studio. The viewing from this terrace was designed on an axis with Philip Johnson's great Trnasco Building which is the Eiffel Tower of Houston. A fire room was added at the end of the diningroom at the same time. The design was generated from the make-up mirror found in many bathrooms. Two mirrored doors on either side of the firebox can be arranged where one can see three fires from the diningroom or two from the living area. The idea of leaving the front of the house a dark weathered stained cedar as is and re-doing the rear in bright, shiny white stucco was on purpose. As a city such as Houston or Tokyo grows more dense, one must put on an architectural street face and a smiling, happy private face.

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This house was built in the mid-30's and purchased by me ten years ago for the purpose of a tear-down. Due to a sewer moratorium in the late 70's, it became impossible to get a building permit for new structures. At that time, I punched some holes in the existing walls and replaced them with glass sliding doors and added some exterior lumps which housed washer/dryer/closets/storage. Then I covered the existing frame with rough cedar shiplape. As you can see from the terrible exterior photos (which are being reshot) that the cedar now has ten years of weather on it and looks very dark and rough.

This area of Houston began to grow and in-fill very rapidly during the early 80's. As my salt box became threatened by the pseudo-Georgian giants springing all around me, I made a decision to go to the rear of the house and built a 32 foot high steel and stucco wall for my architectural and visual privacy. Since I am a Professor of Architecture at the College of Architecture at the University of Houston, I needed a screening room for approximately 30,000 slides. A portion of the third story attic was captured as a studio and on top of that at the fourth level, an upper sun deck was created. Outside the studio, I have a small porch with planter boxes for wildflowers and grapes. As you can see in the photographs, it is two years later and the grapevines are enjoying the Texas sun. Below this area a new bathroom was added at the second level. The steel stair was made of open mesh to create many patterns as the sun moves through the patio. At the ground level is a very large sculpted steel column to hold up said bathroom. Wood decks surround a hot tub with bougainvillae espalieted against the tall stucco wall. Inside there was a fire room added at the end of the dining room. A fireplace was designed same as a makeup mirror with folding mirrored panels on either side so that one can see three fires at once (see photograph). The rest of the structure was basically left the same as the original fifty year old house.

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