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# Papercity

HOUSTON NOVEMBER 2014

## MIND GAMES

Fashion:  
FALL  
ARMOR

THE ROYAL  
TENENBAUMS  
AT HOME

LOVING  
LOULOU  
DE LA FALAISE

DENYING  
CONFORMITY  
CAROL  
ISAAK  
BARDEN

ART:  
TRENTON  
DOYLE HANCOCK  
+ JOOYOUNG  
CHOI

PHOTOGRAPHY SHAYNA FONTANA. STYLIST DIAMOND MAHONE. HAIR KIRSTEN MITCHELL.  
MAKEUP CARMEN WILLIAMSON. MODEL DEVON YARBROUGH, KIM DAWSON AGENCY, DALLAS.  
COAT AND SKIRT BOTH TOME, THROUGH SAKS FIFTH AVENUE.

# the **H** of **O** *of* **G** **J** **S** **E** MANY **S** gardens

Developer Carol Isaak Barden is something selling bespoke modern houses designed and across the country, she recalls the 1970s and early '80s, Houston's halcyon

of an anachronism. Commissioning and by well-known architects from Houston sophisticated developers of the late days of outstanding architectural works by such Pritzker Prize winners as Philip Johnson and Renzo Piano.

**D**uring those boom years, when half the city seemed to be under construction, developer-patrons — eager to differentiate themselves in a saturated market — recognized that superior architectural design, carefully deployed, pays back more than it costs. The boom effectively began in 1976 with the completion of Pennzoil Place, designed by Philip Johnson for developer Gerald Hines (a speculative office building that stands as one of the most important in the United States) and ended on a high note in 1987 with Renzo Piano's Menil Collection, which was inaugurated just as Houston's oil-bust-wracked economy was cratering. Back then, developers understood that they were building a new city — and that creating memorable architecture was crucial to the effort.

This is why Barden's decade-long architectural endeavor is important for the city: Each time she sells one of her rigorously designed speculative houses, she demonstrates that good architecture pays back. She has recently completed house number 17, built in West University Place. Dubbed the "House of Many Gardens," it was designed by one of her long-time collaborators, Scott Strasser, a man known for his stark but poetic spaces and artfully unfolding floor plans. He has designed five previous houses with Barden and is currently working on the design for number 18, the House of Light, to be built next year, just two doors down. Other collaborators have included Houston architects Allen Bianchi and Erick Ragni, New York architect François de Menil, Seattle architects Olson Sundeberg Kundig Allen and Suyama Peterson Deguchi, and for private clients she has collaborated with Sundberg Kennedy Ly-Au Young from Seattle and Christopher Robertson from Houston.

"I'm a tiny company, building one house a year, and I'm

not on everyone's radar," Barden says. "But I do believe my work has demonstrated that there are informed home buyers who are willing to search for quality construction and imaginative design."

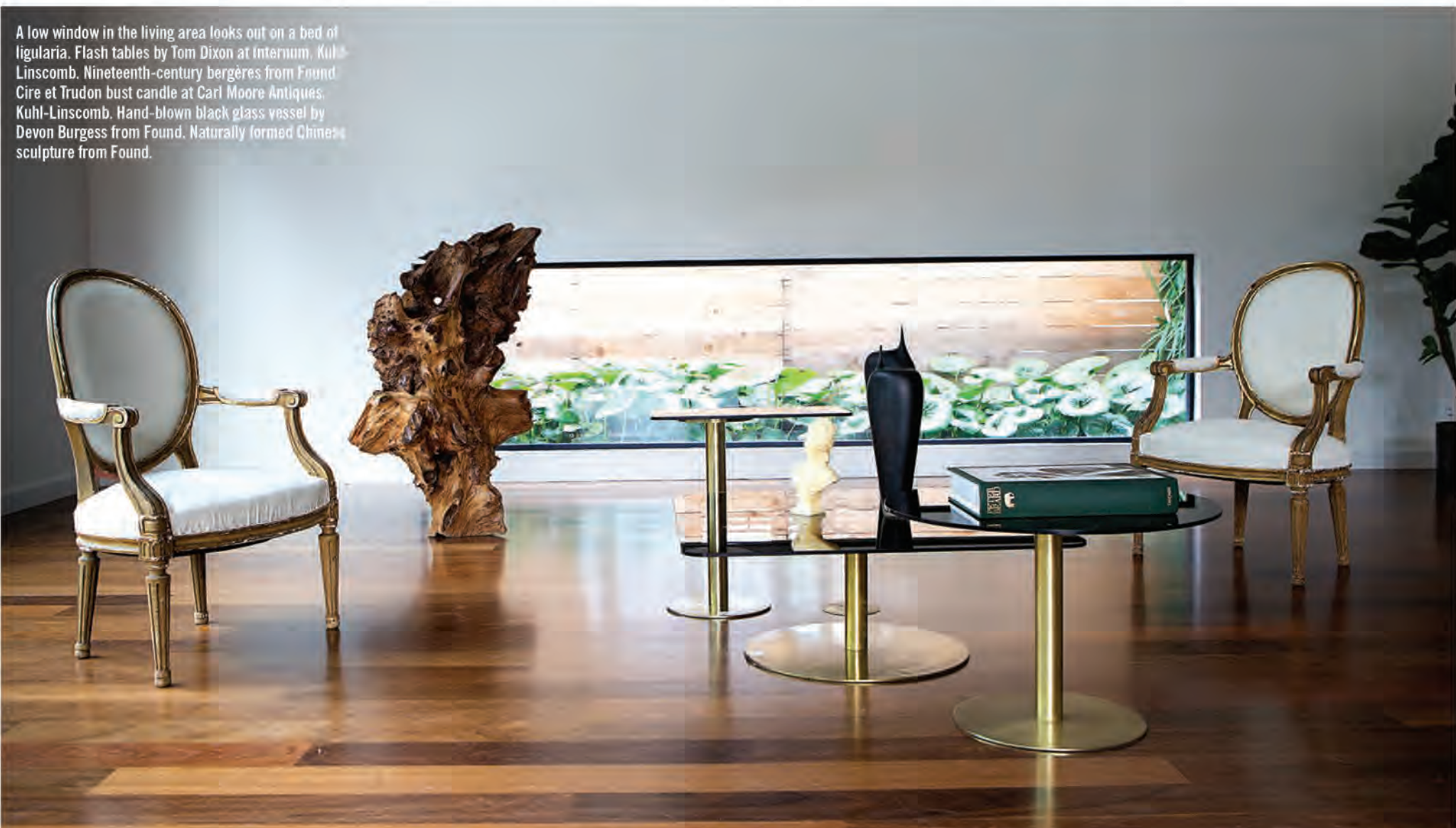
The House of Many Gardens furthers several themes seen in Barden's previous houses. Formally, its cubic massing and mostly white-stucco cladding mark it as resolutely neo-modern. Taking cues from the canonical modern architecture of the 1920s and 1930s in Germany and France, this 5,000-square-foot five-bedroom house faces the street with authority. The two-story asymmetrical façade is blank, save for five closely spaced narrow windows. A band of horizontal gray-stained cypress wood siding slipped below the main upper volume conceals a street-facing garage door and entry gate. And although the house nearly fills the lot — in contrast to Barden's other houses, which suggests she is fighting the forces of an overheated market unable to see the value in open spaces — eight small outdoor gardens have been carved out. Each of these tiny gardens is planted with a single species selected by a young Texas A&M landscape architecture student, Jimmy Solis: Eagleston holly (known for its dense canopies), pines, Japanese maples, ligularia (tractor seats) and ornamental sweet bay magnolias (rare in Texas but prized as far away as France, where they are grown for their fragrant white flowers).

"This is an interior house," Barden says. The entry sequence is pure Strasser, requiring several 90-degree turns before one is admitted to the main living area. The entire house is experienced as a series of carefully orchestrated, often surreal vignettes with surprising visual delights incorporated into the design. Barden herself is responsible for most of the unusual interior fittings, many inspired by her previous career as a travel and design writer. These include the sculptural fireplace

made of flaring steel sheets set between the dining and living rooms, inspired by one she spied in the lobby of Hotel Bel-Air in Los Angeles, as well as the dozen steel-tube pendant lights with bronze finish above one end of the dramatic 43-foot-long counter that traverses from kitchen to dining room, both fabricated in Houston by George Sacaris, who has a degree in architecture but whose focus for the past 26 years has been design and fabrication of architectural details. A screen demarcating the kitchen from the living area is made of 12-foot-tall unfinished, reclaimed white oak columns milled by Brian Connor of BC Woodworks in Houston. The 14-foot-long dining table that seats 18 is made of slabs of black walnut milled by Rand Stockman of Mesquite Unlimited, with a steel base fabricated by Sacaris. Custom steel-framed windows and doors were made in Houston by James Ford, Performance Commercial Glass. Other natural finishes include the ipe flooring, cypress boards fixed to the ceiling, coffee wood paneling the walls of the downstairs powder room and walnut casework with black granite counters. Throughout the house, Strasser positioned windows in unexpected places to grant views of the planted alcoves cut into the space. A low ground-hugging window in the living room, for example, oversees a bed of lily-pad-like ligularia plants.

The results of Carol Barden's project — quality, sophistication and unexpected pleasure — seem so effortless that one wonders why she and her work stand nearly alone in Houston. In a city where selling price is determined by the number of wraps of crown molding, she repudiates decoration with spatial richness. What's more, she does it on a budget and for a profit. Until her colleagues in this city are able to look up from their ledgers and again ask for architecture, we can only be thankful that she is carrying forward the old lessons of good development.

A low window in the living area looks out on a bed of ligularia. Flash tables by Tom Dixon at Internum. Kuhl-Linscomb. Nineteenth-century bergères from Found. Cire et Trudon bust candle at Carl Moore Antiques. Kuhl-Linscomb. Hand-blown black glass vessel by Devon Burgess from Found. Naturally formed Chinese sculpture from Found.



BY BEN KOUSH. PRODUCED BY MICHELLE AVIÑA. PHOTOGRAPHY JACK THOMPSON AND JENNY ANTILL.  
ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN SCOTT STRASSER



The master bath with floating walnut cabinetry has a soaking tub by WETStyle called The Cube, a modern version of the stone tubs still used in the French countryside. Faucets are Newport from WPH.



The front of the house is blank except for a row of tall windows lighting the master bedroom. Chair by Janus et Cie.



A row of custom pendant light fixtures designed by George Sacaris hovers over the 43-foot-long cabinet that spans kitchen to dining room. The 14-foot dining table of black walnut slabs was milled by Rand Stockman of Mesquite Unlimited, with steel base fabricated by George Sacaris. On countertop, Margiela nesting dolls. On table, shoe lasts from Carl Moore Antiques. Charme side chair from Janus et Cie.



The cabinetry in the master bedroom is book-matched American walnut, with honed black granite countertops. Mounted bear skull, Holland, 1940, from Carl Moore Antiques



Row of pendant lights in the dining room, designed by George Sacaris. Greyhound from Carl Moore Antiques.



HAIR AND MAKEUP: TONYA JENSEN

Carol Isaak Barden.



George Sacaris with the custom fireplace hood he designed and fabricated.



Architecturally scaled white oak pillars milled by Brian Connor of BC Woodworks in Houston, demarcate the living area from the dining area. Right: End-cut coffee wood from Horizon Italian Tile covers the walls of the powder room.



The serene kitchen has book-matched American walnut cabinetry and honed black granite countertops.



The neo-modern facade with a band of cypress wood siding.