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Floor to ceiling windows in the living and dining area afford expansive views of the home's forested surroundings.





# Naturally Modern

By Thom Golden  
Photography by Scott Johnson,  
Hawks Photography

**A Tulsa couple uses native materials to build a contemporary gem in Gilcrease Hills.**

Architect Brian Freese says when Mark and Angela Swift first met with him, they had three major objectives for the home they would build together.

"They said the home should be modern and comfortable, it should look appropriate to the landscape and respond to the landscape... and they wanted energy efficiency," says Freese.

The home sits tucked away in the Gilcrease Hills northwest of downtown Tulsa, a site that offers the rare combination of a densely wooded five-acre lot adjacent to a private 20-acre forest preserve and glimpses of the city's skyline. The couple owned the property for several years before building on it.

"It all started when my wife was working with Gilcrease Museum," says Swift. "She fell in love with the area, and luckily this amazing property became available."

Swift says the couple met with a few

architects, but chose Freese because he really understood their vision and their idea of what modern architecture should be. Swift says his admiration for Frank Lloyd Wright and the Prairie School of architecture were a definite influence in the design they were seeking.

Freese describes the home as a perfect example of what he calls Midwest Modern – a style that is open with clean lines, but is also relaxed and incorporates local natural materials.

"The style is not trying to look like it came from another part of the world, but instead is thoroughly Oklahoman," says Freese.

Freese employed a number of techniques to incorporate the home into its surroundings. Most notable is the extensive use of Oklahoma sandstone for both the home's exterior and interior. Freese says the colors of the sandstone, the reds, browns and buff colors, blend perfectly with the surroundings and, in fact, there are similar outcroppings



on the property. He also says the building's long, low profile punctuated with vertical elements, such as the massive chimney, serves to mirror the Midwestern landscape and give the home interest.

"It's evocative of what happens in nature, where the horizon is always broken by vertical elements," says Freese. "Here the chimney serves as an anchor."

The home was also carefully positioned on the property to maximize the southern exposure and to take advantage of natural elements of the site, including an ephemeral stream that is visible from the master suite.

The southern exposure and vast expanses of glass help make the home more energy efficient. In the winter, ample windows allow the sun to heat the house, but during summer the dense shade from the forest helps cool things off. Roofing with a large overhang also helps to shade the home.

Swift says that a future landscape plan will further meld the home to its surroundings using additional native stone, hardy native plants and low maintenance shade plants.

Inside, the home is oriented along a central hallway, which is delineated by granite flooring and a series of sandstone pylons that serve to simultaneously define spaces and unify the interior.

The living and dining area is a soaring space with 15-foot ceilings with Douglas fir beams and floor to ceiling windows. The large fireplace is positioned on the interior of the room where it can be viewed from several angles, yet not be the focal point of the room.

"The centerpiece of the room is clearly the view," says Freese.

In the adjacent kitchen, ceiling height is brought down to a more comfortable volume, but a large window above the sink provides the crucial view found in each room of the house. Even the pantry has a large window looking out onto the entryway. The homeowners worked with the architect to select simple Mission-style cabinetry topped off with honed granite counters.

The master suite is positioned at the opposite end of the house. The corner of the bedroom is an expanse of windows, which offers a birdseye view of the surrounding forest. The view is also a major feature of the bathroom, with a large window above the bathtub and a window between the vanities. As in the rest of the home, the materials are simple and natural.

Deer, foxes, a menagerie of birds and other wildlife are frequent visitors to the property, and the living room has become the Swift's favorite spot for watching the constant activity of their natural surroundings.

"That and my wife really loves the large, open kitchen," says Swift. "She never really had that in our previous homes."



The spacious kitchen features simple Shaker-style cabinetry with honed granite countertops and it's own spectacular view.



Architect Brian Freese carefully positioned the home to take advantage of the many natural elements of the site.



Simple, natural elements are also used in the master bath, where the homeowners can take in the natural setting while soaking in the tub.