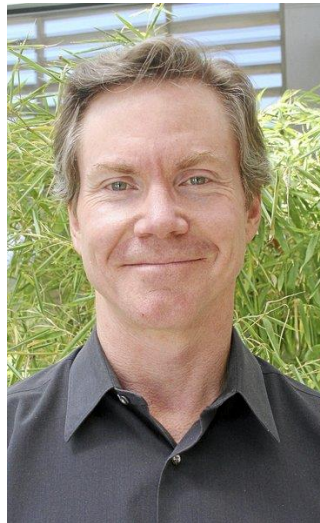


Architect creates modernism with warmth, simplicity

Architect uses natural materials and simple lines to create sense of modernism

KIM BROWN World Scene Writer

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Brian Freese: "Buildings in Oklahoma should reflect the era in which we live, and that means our buildings can be contemporary and modern," the award-winning architect said.

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To some, the idea of modern design leaves them cold.

"A lot of people bristle at the sound of the word, 'modern,' " said Tulsa architect Brian Freese. "A lot of people see it as very cold, stainless steel and a white box."

Rather, Freese's approach in his residential design projects - he says his "heart and soul is in modernism - is to keep the lines simple, while retaining warmth through materials, personal touches and most importantly, the element of nature."

"I'm a fan of regional architecture. That means a building is designed to fit into its location and its region of the country," he said. "Each place has its own geography, and Oklahoma is unique. Buildings in Oklahoma should reflect the era in which we live, and that means our buildings can be contemporary and modern."

Warm and approachable

Freese Architecture recently earned three honors from the American Institute of Architects Eastern Oklahoma Chapter, including a citation award for a residential home in Tulsa's Ranch Acres neighborhood. He also won a merit award for a second residence in Oklahoma City and another citation award for his work in the restoration-rehabilitation-adaptive category for St. Joseph Monastery in Tulsa.

Freese said the modern home he designed in Ranch Acres - a look that he calls Midwest modern - is a good example of how to use modernism in a warm, approachable way.

"I designed the house using warm, natural materials, and I designed it in a clean fashion," he said. "I avoided unnecessary materials and used wood, stone and concrete. I do not like a lot of cut-up spaces, and it's important that homes be open to the outside. I know we are nurtured by nature and we have to have an abundance of sunlight and fresh air."

The U-shaped home was designed around a central courtyard surrounded by glass - so the homeowner can see the outdoors from practically every space inside.

"This client's house has a long horizontal line, and it sits firmly on the ground," Freese said. "What's unique to Oklahoma is the feeling of outdoor spaces, and in that story, is the sense of the horizon line, in particular the flat land areas."

The line, combined with the other materials in the home - including French limestone flooring and Tennessee crab orchard stone as the overhang on the roof - give it a "muscular" and "fortress-like" feeling for the homeowner, who appreciates her privacy, Freese said.

From the inside

The interior design of the home was a crucial step in giving this midtown ranch home its modern but warm feel. Freese worked with Carolyn Fielder Nierenberg, a certified designer from the American Society of Interior Designers, who works with Campbell Design Associates in Tulsa.

Nierenberg used a neutral palette to highlight the homeowner's art collection, furniture and special pieces, she said.

"The paint color was the same color on the walls and the woodwork, so as not to create a contrast," she said. "It left the background for her furnishings."

Warmth is expressed in the kitchen with the stained cabinets that are a "warm, dark brown tone to feel more like furniture," she said.

And for the furniture in the great room, Nierenberg and the homeowner selected "very little pattern, mainly texture in warm tones."

The sense of nature in the home makes it inviting and feels like a retreat for the homeowner.

"There are a handful of houses that I've been involved with for a client that I'm praying they invite me inside," Freese said. "It's a compliment when many clients tell me they feel like they are on a vacation or on a resort in their own home."

Warming up to a modern look

Tulsa interior designer Carolyn Fielder Nierenberg offers some more tips on making a home warm and inviting while keeping the simple look of modernism. She said that many clients are requesting this look, "from all ages."

"There is really a movement to declutter interiors and have cleaner, more tailored look," she said.

- Use a neutral, warm tone for paint, and use the color for the walls and the moldings and wood fixtures "so as not to create a contrast."
 - Choose neutral, warm window coverings to blend in with the paint color, rather than contrast.
 - Choose large pieces of art, rather than smaller, clustered pieces.
 - Choose only a few small accessories around the home.
 - To remove clutter from area, "remove everything from every table and wall, then add them back one or two pieces at a time."
 - Use selective decorative chandeliers or lighting fixtures to eliminate clutter.
 - Instead, choose incandescent recessed lighting if possible because it "has a warmer color tone - it almost feels like natural sunlight."
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Other local honorees at the biennial AIA of Eastern Oklahoma awards

- GH2 Architects received an award in the architecture-commercial category for the Jenks Public Schools Math and Science Center - The 25-Year Award was given to PSA Dewberry for the landmark MidContinent Tower.
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