

HOME TOUR



House of glass: The treetop living room of developer Matt Holley's home in Kessler Woods is a serene setting for cocktails. An Arco floor lamp illuminates low-slung seating from B&B Italia, while a Kazhal shag rug adds warmth and texture underfoot. On the fireplace, an oil-on-metal piece by artist David Cronin is a nod to an old-fashioned Ingres portrait.

Holley's Woods

AS KESSLER WOODS' DEVELOPER AND NEWEST RESIDENT, MATT HOLLEY IS BRINGING A SHOT OF CONTEMPORARY COOL TO ONE OF OAK CLIFF'S OLDEST NEIGHBORHOODS

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Some things are a given in Oak Cliff's stately Kessler Park neighborhood: meandering streets, lush trees, gracious period homes. Greek revival columns and Tudor archways stand alongside Mediterranean porticos in a grand display of traditional curb appeal.

Matt Holley knows it well. The telecom guru turned developer used to live in a restored Tudor here, two doors down from Mayer Lazar Miller's then-abode.

Holley loved the home and its location south of the Trinity, but he was also nurturing a longtime interest in contemporary design. He particularly loved midcentury modernism, with its clean lines and focus on connecting indoor and outdoor spaces. A vision began to crystallize.

Turns out, Ohio-born Holley, 43, loved to draw houses as a kid — call it foreshadowing. "I actually considered pursuing an architecture degree in college," says Holley, who ended up with an industrial distribution degree from Texas A&M. Ultimately, that choice may have



Homeowner Matt Holley



Space and light define the home's open-plan interior. Carrera-marble floors (repeated on the kitchen island, which is anchored by chrome and leather B&B Italia bar chairs) flow from the kitchen to the banquette. The custom breakfast nook has a new Corian tabletop added to a base from Collage 20th Century Classics. Next to the steel staircase, a chromium-plated Flou suspension chandelier adds a bright focus.

come in handy when plans for his dream house grew to become a 20-lot development called Kessler Woods. The 10-acre enclave of contemporary homes broke ground in 2003.

Three years later, the gated neighborhood is discreetly integrated into its quiet West Kessler neighborhood, near Stevens Park Golf Course. Drive through the main entrance, however, and you'll find a cluster of striking homes in progress. With glass walls and modular frames of steel and wood, the structures are at once ultramodern and decidedly retro. That's no accident.

"These homes are inspired by midcentury-modern architecture. It's our interpretation of that period," says Holley, who worked with architect Patrick Blumstein on his recently completed 4,300-square-foot home.

"We try to benefit from everything that was wonderful about that era's design, but also take advantage of today's technology and conveniences, such as having larger closets," he passes. "Well, these aren't North Dallas-size closets, but for a modern home, they're quite large."

On this day, Holley is standing inside his stainless-steel-kitchen, pouring a fresh cup of coffee. Behind him, a steel staircase rises beside a two-story wall of glass overlooking a central courtyard planted with towering bamboo. The space is open, yet still seems private. "You feel like nature is in here with you," says Holley.

Adding to the Zen feeling is a long, narrow hot pool that runs underneath the entry steps outside. A separate patio is home to a multi-



functional dipping and lap-pool. At night, the lit pool casts watery shadows that dance along the surrounding brick walls.

"The focus is really on indoor-outdoor spaces — how they flow and merge and what their relationship to the outside is," says Holley. "It's tricky to do here in Texas, because of our weather, but I think you can still create spaces that are ideal for outside for certain times."

Holley is the third resident to move into Kessler Woods. Most of the 20 home sites are in various stages of construction, and just seven properties remain unsold.

Not bad, considering the skepticism Holley faced when he first tried to secure financing for the project.

"The banks really tried to discourage me," he says. "They were all for doing a development, they just weren't for doing a development of modern homes. There was nothing that they could point to at the time that said it could be done, and now there is."

Indeed. In addition to strong sales, Kessler Woods has been getting mega buzz. Last year, even *The New York Times* came calling, citing the development for its smart use of space.

"There is a big market out there for modern that's not being served," says Holley. "And many people who like this design also like the more established neighborhoods in town, but feel that they can't go in and just up a modern structure because it will stand out so much — and not in a good way."

The Kessler Woods site, in contrast, is deliberately integrated into its environment. The adjacent 22-acre Twelve Hills Nature Center

"I've had the vision of this project in my head for a long time. I've always been able to see it, but now it's a reality."

MATT HOLLEY



Chic courtyard: Modular walls of Iroko wood from Spain add warmth to this tucked-away sitting area dressed with blue river stones and a Lucca table and chairs.



Color mix: Holley's black antique Weber baby grand piano is a study in contrast atop white Carrera marble floors in the music room.



A sitting area features Holley's minimalist media equipment — a plasma flat screen and surround sound — and makes for a short walk to the kitchen's Sub-Zero fridge for a chilled bottle of wine.

Wide open space: The master bedroom suite tucks out onto the home's central courtyard with a rooftop deck and a "Business Club" library by Philippe Starck.



A corner of windows: In the master suite is a perfect spot for reading on a BAR Italia lounge. An ornate German wall clock hangs in contrast with the modern furnishings.

These summers are no match for Holly's cool, multifunctional sleeping pool, spa and deck. The lounge chairs lounge from George Ström. Beach is perfect for cocktails and sunning.



come about is just by opportunity from the development. Technology is another key. "When they were building these homes in the '80s and '90s, they didn't work as well outside of California," says Holly. "In Texas, how could you cool a house like that? The technology just wasn't there."

"Homes today have double-paneled windows, smart air conditioning and insulation that makes them almost airtight. I'm involved with some other projects right now when the average total energy cost each month is \$100. The technology has finally caught up with the design."

Holly, who spent 15 years in the telecommunications business, says he's working everywhere from Silicon Valley to New York, to his own technology.

"I love golfing," he confesses, leading the way to the home's terrace, a large, temperature-controlled space filled with vines and awnings.

The garden features on a well-manicured hillside and down from Linton shades throughout the house are solar or laser-to-the-sunlight or create more privacy. Holly used to adjust the light spectral rays, sometimes leaving just a soft glow pathway from the kitchen to the master suite upstairs — a nightlight for grown-ups.

Holly's attention to detail extends to doors and furnishings. He worked closely with Moby & Moby Interiors' Yasuhiko Moby and interior designer Scott Beach (formerly with Dallas-based Bedoux + Pratt) to pull together the home's interior.

Most of the furnishings are BAR Italia. In May 2005, Holly flew to Milan to meet directly with the designers and make his final selections of fabrics, colors and shapes. "I wanted to see everything for myself first, and actually touch the fabrics and confirm the choices we had made," he says.

The result is a very minimalist collection of low-slung pieces that live with the space and don't compete with the natural views for attention. Throughout the house, a small



Dining is a formal affair at Holly's. A show-stopping table in gray oak with a chrome base, surrounded by Moby's very leather chairs — all by BAR Italia. Overhead, the "Café des Lumières" chandelier by Philippe Starck for Foscarini glimmers.

collection of family antiques adds texture and contrast to the streamlined aesthetic. In the bedroom, for example, an ornate German wall clock that belonged to Holly's grandmother hangs over a dark lounge. In the living room, a restored White Oak grand piano with history and drama.

We take it all in as we join Holly on the home's master upstairs patio, where there's a commanding view of the development. Despite the chaos of construction and equipment, the view is better than most.

"I've had the view of this project in my head for a long time," he says. "I've always been able to see it, but now it's a reality."

And now that's expanding. Holly is already in the early stages of projects in Ft. Worth and Lubbock, inspired by Kessler Woods, though each will have its own personality. Still, it's unclear that future projects will erode the feeling of accomplishment that Holly has gained from seeing Kessler Woods through to fruition.

"It's the hardest thing I've ever done in my life, without question, but also the most rewarding," says Holly. "The team involved in every detail here, from working with the architect and designers to picking up the line in the street. The project has been just a complete and other pouring out about here."

AT A GLANCE: KESSLER WOODS

- A gated residential community of new, modern luxury homes in Kessler Park, priced from \$750,000 to \$1.8 million
- 30 homes sales total, most of which remain available, starting from 1,500 square feet to one-third acre
- More information at www.kesslerwoods.com

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