



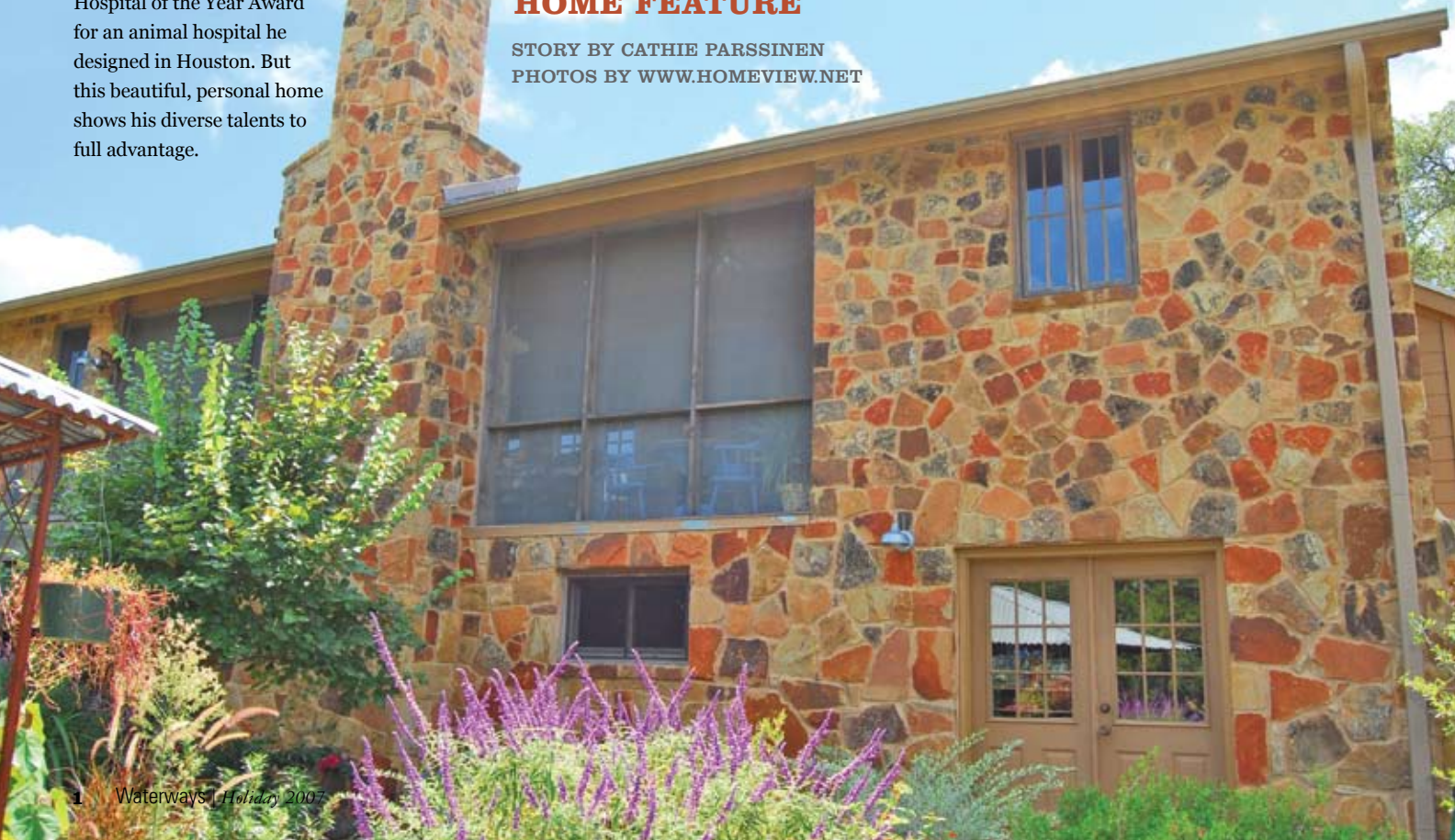
## A Santa Fe Garden

**W**HEN A BUILDER BUILDS A HOME to live in himself, he finds himself with an animal completely different from those on display in the “dog-and-pony” show that features current stock in the custom spec market. And so it was when Ralph and Darlene Thibodeau built their charming hill country rustic ranch home in Briarcliff. Ralph Thibodeau, AIA Architect, has enjoyed a thriving architectural practice for 28 years, specializing in commercial and also custom residential design. He has designed car dealerships, libraries and fire stations, but he has specialized in animal hospitals. In fact, in 2007 the Annual Animal Hospital Design Association honored his work with the 2007 Hospital of the Year Award for an animal hospital he designed in Houston. But this beautiful, personal home shows his diverse talents to full advantage.

# Pathway to Paradise

## HOME FEATURE

STORY BY CATHIE PARSSINEN  
PHOTOS BY WWW.HOMEVIEW.NET





The home is built around a modified dog-run design, with a clear path through the expansive great room that connects French doors to the back gardens with the front entry. All of the doors in the home are constructed of knotty pine, with the exception of the front door, which was fashioned from hand-chiseled mesquite. In the course of Ralph's business-related travels, he stumbled across a 1910 farmhouse in Comanche, Texas that was in the process of being torn down and dismembered. With his enduring commitment to recycling time-honored materials, Ralph purchased the beautifully aged, long leaf yellow pine wood floors from the farmhouse. Subsequentl, he arranged to have the wood transported to Fredericksburg to be remilled. The old-world gleam they grant throughout the home is matchless. In other rooms, the Thibodeaus used stained concrete, and, in still others, they added chocolate travertine from Mexico, a perfect setting for the artful mosaics designed and installed by Darlene. Her use of sliced river rock beneath the old-fashioned tub (just visible on page \_\_\_\_\_) and the addition of old forest slate in the bathrooms continues the powerful connection between the home and the natural elements used in its construction.

Ralph's building company, Matrix Development, relies on Jim Bishop Cabinets to produce high-end cabinetry for custom clients. Many of the cabinets in the Thibodeau home were built by Jim Bishop, including those in the kitchen that were painted with a red base coat and finished with a chocolate glaze. However, Ralph designed some of the cabinets himself and, through a Mexican import company, arranged to have them built to his specifications in Mexico.





While Ralph takes credit for the home's design, Darlene is responsible for the eclectic French-country interiors. The rooms burst with the vivid colors of the south of France. Warm and inviting, this bold palette of color recreates nature's gift of sky-blues, sunset-reds, verdant-greens and sun-yellows. The home is completely devoid of all trim. Bull-nosed walls were hand-trowelled to recreate the look of authentic plaster.

Ralph's Texas roots lent the inspiration for the construction of an old-fashioned "mud room." When Ralph returns from a hunting expedition or a long day working in the garden, the mud room, with its comfortable old bench, coat rack and washer and dryer, provides his first point of access to the house . . . a place where he can remove his muddy boots and





greet Frankie and Millie, the Thibodeau's two dogs who have staked an undisputed claim on the "mud room."

Amazing though it may seem, this treasured home is for sale! Why, might one ask, would Ralph and Darlene give up this personal and intimate pathway to paradise? That question has a two-fold answer. Creative people just cannot stop creating. They are subject to a force that refuses to be subjugated to logic. Ralph and Darlene recently fell in love with (and purchased) a nearby lot, high on a hill, with breathtaking views of the canyons and Lake Travis. And so they will defy the logic that led them to label their current home "Casa NO MAS!," and begin yet another labor of love. And, although this home, at 3200+ sq. ft. is very manageable for a custom, these two creative empty-nesters with very busy lives also want a new home that will be just a tad bit smaller.

For more information about this home, contact Wayne Zercher, Realtor® at 512.789.3485

