



One working woman retreats to her updated Hill Country ranch to "unwind when everything else is crazy."

RANCHO deluxe

The highway that cuts through the Texas hill country sheds little light on the lives and settings behind the roadside gates. One can, however, surmise that they must be tranquil.

Beyond one rejuvenated gate, a dirt road curls by trees, water tanks, a riding ring, wood fencing, dogs and horses. It approaches an idyllic sprawl of uneven limestone buildings, a detached carriage house and courtyards brimming with plants.

A main house, separate kitchen, smokehouse and cistern were built around 1850. The limestone structures remain intact and dignified through 145 years of maintenance and updating. Patios, odd walkways and clandestine courtyards connect them, encompassed by a low stone wall. The owner continued the upkeep as her parents did, and has added and altered parts of the compound with the help of a Boerne builder, James Seiter.

The former kitchen now serves as a guest house with an added stucco bathroom and shuttered screen doors. A new kitchen completes

the seven-room main house.

An elevated cistern collected rain for years as the ranch's sole source of drinking water. Now employed as a pool, it has undergone a makeover: clean plaster lining within and fuchsia bougainvilleas fanning its enclave.



Limestone steps to the pool back up on an open patio with a corner arbor, shading cushioned chairs. Breezes wash through, trees' shadows waver on the stone below.

Plants, some politely groomed, others rebelliously casual, edge and tumble onto the limestone patios and walkways connecting the structures. Some flower beds look as

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Left: Smokehouse evidence is visible in the living room, where the shelf that once dried meat now is donned in smooth white plaster, holds antique objects and plants, and runs behind a floral couch. **Above:** Across a wrought iron fence flanked with green tomato vines, fallow and white-tail deer graze.



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Above: Patios, odd walkways and clandestine courtyards connect the main house, separate kitchen, smokehouse and cistern, built around 1850.

Facing page, from top: The owner has an office in San Antonio, and relies on the ranch's serenity to relax; an elevated cistern collected rain for years as the ranch's sole source of drinking water, and now serves as a pool; in the bedroom, tall heavy wooden doors, salvaged from a pioneer storefront in San Antonio, have been recycled into cabinets.

though gumballs were planted, later blooming through the soil. Around the courtyards a smiling man silently putters.

The former smokehouse was renovated in 1994, now the owner's personal quarters and office. Situated slightly apart from the rest of the compound, the two-story limestone structure provides a private niche. Her daughter, son-in-law and son still visit with friends, and all have personal areas.

Smokehouse evidence is visible in the living room, where the shelf that once dried meat now is donned in smooth white plaster, holds antique objects and plants, and runs behind a floral couch. Small windows that expelled smoke remain in the walls, and the smokehouse's lofty vaulted ceiling and tall plaster walls (redone by Seiter and the owner's daughter) give the white room an ethereal ambiance.

The walls join floors of creamy stone bricks, interspersed with dark squares of antique pine bricks (salvaged from an old San Antonio stable), that flow beneath all rooms. The bricks are cool for bare feet to pad across.

The owner likes old doors. She and her mother have found, collected and stored them and other discarded treasures for years in the ranch's barn. The doors were relocated or recycled into stacks of broad cabinets in the bedroom, bathroom and kitchen. Screwed into cabinet doors are tiny Mexican iron handles, shaped as frogs and lizards.

In the bedroom, tall heavy wooden doors, salvaged from a pioneer storefront in San Antonio, straddle a fireplace with hand-carved limestone mantle quarried from the Welfare area.





Through the long windows of the doors one looks out to a large private courtyard. The doors stay open in good weather, and notes from a water garden float in the apartment, joining soft stereo melodies and dinner aromas circulating through the rooms.

Looking up in the bedroom, perpendicular to the cabinet tops holding a collection of Staffordshire dogs, one sees an iron balcony holding two brightly upholstered antique chairs. Behind them, doors open into the owner's home-office. The office is accessed by an exterior wooden stairway.

Above, left: The owner likes old doors, and that influence permeates most of the entryways.

Above, right: Breezes wash through the open porch shading a wooden bench.

Right: The place has a refined, aged quality exemplified by this poolside artwork.

The decorator also has an office in the city and a full work schedule. She relies on the ranch's serenity to relax. "This environment is the peace in my life. This is where I unwind when everything else is crazy," she says.

The animals there relax as

well. Beneath the office staircase's planks, a cat sleeps on sun-striped rock. Across a wrought-iron fence flanked with green tomato vines, fallow and white-tail deer graze.

The place has good human qualities. Nothing is symmetrical and nothing is brand new, but nothing is really accidental, either. It's become more real with age and the necessity and desire to endure: peace achieved through a sense of purpose and appreciation.

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