

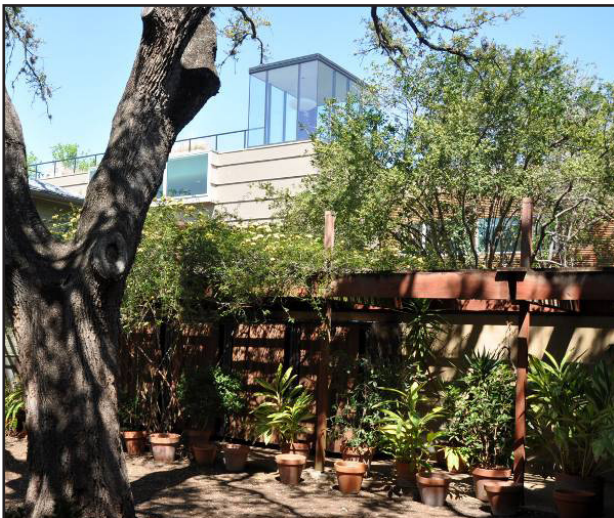
Cliff Street Complex

KEVIN ALTER

University of Texas at Austin

ERNESTO CRAGNOLINO

University of Texas at Austin



In 1959 the important mid-century architect Harwell Hamilton Harris built a 3-unit apartment building eight blocks west of the University of Texas, behind a single-family bungalow. The HHH units exist between a new entry courtyard with an exceptional live oak tree and a thicket of bamboo behind. An opportunity arose for us to purchase both buildings and the adjacent lot, which in turn allowed us to restore the buildings from their state of disrepair and add two more units to the ensemble.

While independent of the original buildings, the new duplex needed to maintain their parking requirement in addition to providing spaces for the new units. The new duplex defines two private courtyards around mature persimmon and crepe myrtle





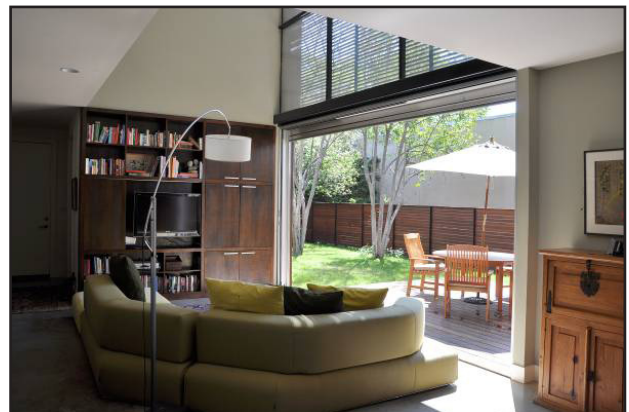
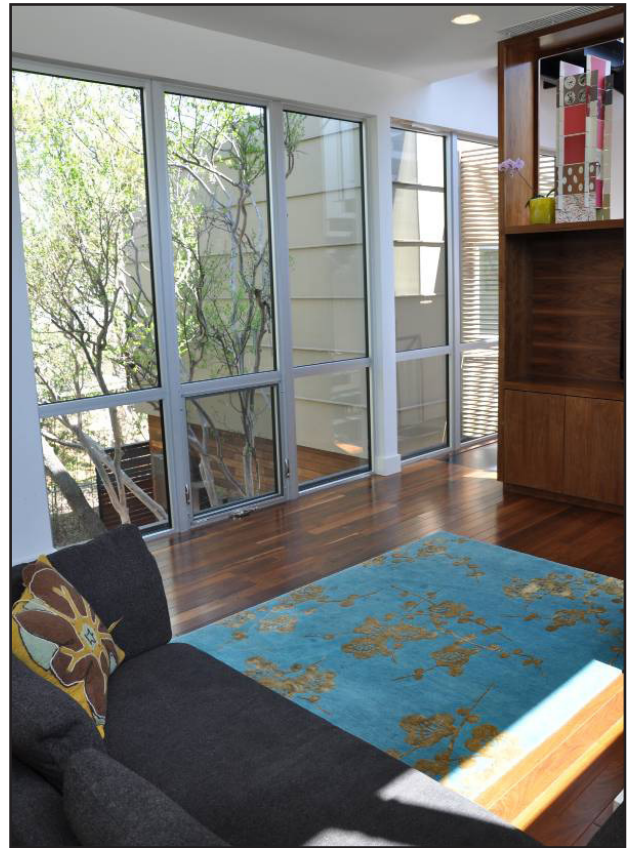
trees, and like the HHH building, the units are organized to negotiate between these private spaces and the dense foliage of the adjacent tree canopy. Entry for both units is drawn deep into the compound and encourages community between the occupants.

Hovering above the complex's parking, the 1500 sf building in the front poses floor to ceiling windows to the courtyard while high windows to the south provide a sense of seclusion and continuity with the trees and sky. A delicate steel stair allows access to a roof deck and 360° views. Meanwhile the rear, 2000 sf building is organized around a double height interior space that opens generously onto a private garden.

The ensemble adds much needed density to this one time single-family, central Austin neighborhood, although recent City of Austin compatibility ordinances will unfortunately no longer allow such a carefully orchestrated development. The seven different sized units form a vibrant community in which each home is construed as a secluded enclave open to the out-of-doors, in close proximity to its neighbors and adjacent to significant communal spaces. Like the un-dogmatic modernism of the HHH ensemble that it completes, the new buildings present an optimistic architecture that embraces the pleasures of continuity with the out-of-doors, the serendipity of light and shadow, seclusion and community.

CLIENT NOTES

Fulfilling the programmatic requirements in our case wasn't a easy fix. We decided to down size



over 1,000 square feet from our previous house. This made every foot valuable for our family to live comfortably especially with a new baby boy. We needed a space that worked privately and publicly in a very confined duplex lot. Window placement was a key factor in achieving this for us with the other residence within feet of us. We have all the light with large storefront style windows and privacy to be ourselves at the same time. Each unit has its private yard and covered parking. It didn't help that we had space crunches outside as well with parking deeded to the neighbors on our lot and great old trees to build around. In fact the arborist at the city of Austin told me he wished everyone took that much care in designing with the trees in mind. It was nothing short of a miracle to get everything we wanted in such a small workable space. Strangely enough with our smaller house we now entertain more. Knowing that was important to us the house was designed with a roof deck for city views and a very open floor plan. This gave us the freedom to live the lifestyle we had before without the energy bills or the long commute in to work.

- Richard White

