

# Texas Taj

Architects Charles Moore and Arthur Andersson  
create a vigorous hybrid of local  
and exotic traditions. By Martin Filler  
Photographs by Langdon Clay

Charles Moore has designed hundreds of houses over the past 35 years and has played a central role in bringing traditional symbols of domestic architecture back onto the contemporary scene. The pitched roof, the clearly defined front door, an interest in local styles, and emphasis on a distinctive sense of place are all things Moore helped reestablish long before the term Postmodern was ever used to describe his work. Unlike many of his colleagues, his fascination with houses has never diminished, even as the scope and volume of his practice have widened with his reputation.

But a house by Charles Moore can be a very different thing depending on the colleague he designs it with. These days he is most likely to work with much younger architects in the four firms he maintains ties with in Connecticut, California, and Texas. Among the more interesting Moore houses of the past few years have been those he has produced with Arthur Andersson, his partner in Austin, Texas. Always responsive to the vernacular architecture of a region, Moore began to draw upon the Texas farmhouse style after his move there in 1984. Nonetheless, the interiors of those Texas houses have retained the amazing spaces for which he is famous. This is his so-called geode format—a plain exterior concealing a center of unexpected richness.

That happens once again in Moore and Andersson's latest house, a rambling red-brick ranch in a quiet wooded area of a big Texas city. The clients, who took an unusually active role in the project, insisted that the architects—including their local associate, John Mullen—use brick, a material Moore rarely employs. It gives the scheme a more conventional outward appearance than even the most intentionally ordinary Moore designs, which usually betray some sly cue that all is not as simple as it initially seems.

The big surprise comes as one moves into the entry hall and turns either left or right. There are a pair of fanciful doorways, one leading into the dining room, the other the living room. Both portals, Mughal Indian in inspiration, are deeply

The exterior draws on the Texas vernacular but conceals a surprising interior inspired by India. Leaded clerestory windows recall Frank Lloyd Wright. The courtyard overlooking the pool is planted with Mexican plum trees.

The soaring stepped ceiling of the living room was based on the Mughal architecture of India and provides a majestic context for large-scale paintings by Helen Frankenthaler, Richard Diebenkorn, and Philip Guston. Dhurrie carpet from Doris Leslie Blau, NYC. Ceiling is painted in several shades of gray chosen by color consultant Tina Beebe. The interior design of the house is by decorator Dan Nelson. Details see Resources.





recessed and dramatically lit to make one look up into the “pleasure domes”—as Moore has playfully dubbed them—surmounting the transitional passages. This is the kind of beguiling spatial experience for which he is famous, and it gives delight in the childlike way he likes best.

Shortly after they received the commission for the house, Moore and Andersson were in India working on their contribution to the Cooper-Hewitt Museum’s 1985–86 exhibition “The Golden Eye” in which architects and designers worked in close collaboration with Indian craftsmen. The partners’ immersion in the Mughal architecture of Delhi had an immediate effect on the Texas project, yet the design inspiration is not as farfetched as it might seem.

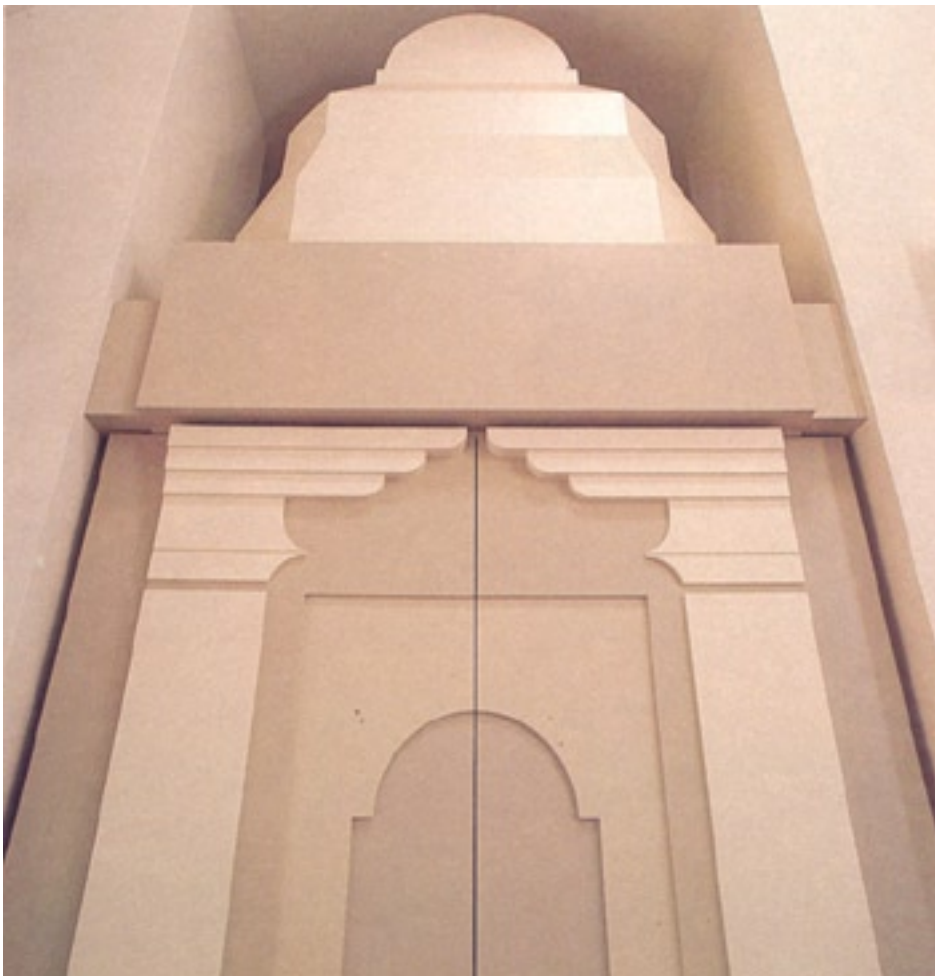
It was the strong forms, not the intricate decorative motifs, of Mughal architecture that Moore and Andersson used as their starting point, and those lofty volumes are eminently suited to the hot Texas climate. In the living room, for example, the soaring stepped ceiling gives an expansive feeling of visual refreshment. This is architectural borrowing of the most intelligent sort, unafraid to be wide-ranging but none-

theless assured in its appropriateness.

The emphasis on architectural space overhead also frees large expanses of wall for the owners’ noteworthy collection of contemporary painting and sculpture. The works make up a veritable checklist of the most acclaimed names in art today: Diebenkorn, Jenney, Johns, Kelly, Moskowitz, Oldenburg, Ruscha, Shapiro, Stella, Twombly, and Winsor. The equilibrium between art and architecture is judiciously balanced, and both are enhanced in a way rarely found in houses where the architect is at least as well known as the artists.

The site, though not large, is beautifully landscaped. Thanks to the architects’ careful placement of the structure, numerous mature trees were preserved and give the house the uncanny feeling of having been there much longer than it has been. That is also a sign of how skillfully Moore and Andersson have integrated age-old forms, substantial materials, and sophisticated details into a coherent and serene whole. This is architecture quite ready to defer to history. For although very much of its moment and locale, it also adheres to timeless and international notions of the house as a calm and enduring place. ▲

*Editor: Elizabeth Sverbeyeff Byron*



The dining room contains a number of works from the owners' contemporary art collection, including, from left, pieces by Robert Moskowitz, Neil Jenney, Jud Fine, Frank Stella, and Claes Oldenburg. Dhurrie carpet from Stark.

Opposite: The entry hall is an affectionate tribute to Mughal architecture. The deeply recessed portal leading from the entry hall into the dining room is surmounted by a "pleasure dome," which one can look up into while passing beneath it.

