



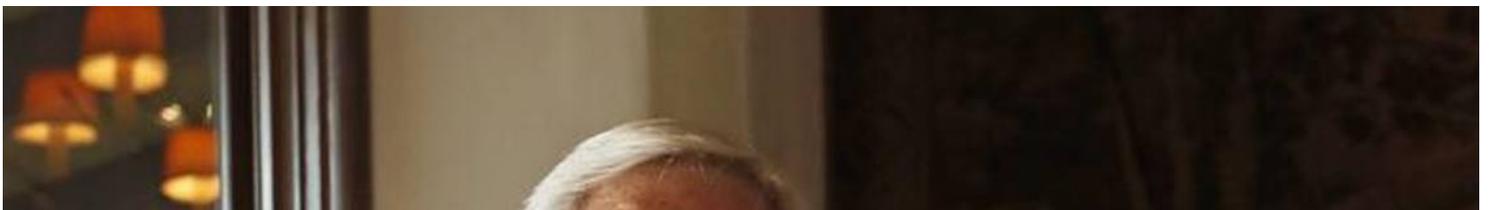
HOMES

Whimsical By Design: Charles Dilbeck's 1938 ranch house still exudes luxury, comfort

BY GAILE ROBINSON
PHOTOS BY PAUL MOSELEY

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Charles Dilbeck was a romantic architect whose copious output over a 60-year career encompassing the mid-1900s is still dotted across North Texas. His homes are considered eclectic gems, and one of his more remarkable structures is in Westlake in north Tarrant County. It is an elaborately imagined ranch house built in 1938 for a publisher of The Dallas Morning News, Ted Dealey. For the past 40 years, Scott and Kelly Bradley have owned it.







Scott and Kelly Bradley, owners of Paigebrooke Farm.

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Like many Dilbeck devotees, the Bradleys have spent a fortune on their home — updating the kitchen and bathrooms, expanding the tiny closets, adding a master bedroom wing and guest house. In doing so, they doubled the square footage.

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Twenty years ago, the house stood in the way of Westlake's progress. This just wouldn't do; Scott had been voted the mayor of Westlake in 17 elections. So the Bradleys upped sticks and bricks and moved the house two miles down the road to make way for Fidelity Investments.

The massive brick house with five fireplaces had to be cut into six major chunks and trucked to the new site. During the process, orchestrated by Nancy McCoy — now a principal of Quimby McCoy Preservation Architecture — a basement that was part of the original plans but never realized by Dealey was added.

While it might seem extreme to move a house just a few miles, the Bradleys adore their Dilbeck. It had grown with their family and they weren't going to abandon it. They wanted the 20-year love affair to continue.





The first level office.

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When they first saw the house in 1977, it had been abandoned for years and they had to evict the squatters — raccoons and rodents — that had not been good stewards of the property. The house was a shambles, but the Bradleys recognized its potential for renovation even though they suspected some serious issues. They bought the house and the surrounding 130 acres and named it Paigebrooke Farm after their two daughters. Then they began the onerous task of rehabilitation.

While the swayback roofline looked like there might be foundation problems, Scott consulted several engineers only to learn there was no problem — just an eccentric design element Dilbeck often used to instantly age his homes. The foundation was solid; more cement was used than that in a 40-story building, Scott was told.

Dilbeck was famous for creating a faux-ancestral look to his homes by including design elements that suggest additions from a later age. “He believed if you looked hard enough, you’d see the original log cabin in every home he built,” says Scott.



The terrace designed by Elizabeth Smidt of Great Gardens allows the Bradleys to entertain on a grand scale.

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Each symbolic addition would be highlighted with contrasting materials, using stucco instead of brick or wood where the rest of the exterior was stone. This gave new construction an instant age.

Dilbeck would take creative liberties with mismatched chimneys, add dovecotes to the roofline, and insert turrets and cupolas discreetly into the facade — an idea that runs counter to contemporary use of turrets. Dilbecks have a scale that is appropriate to the house and they do not shout their inclusion.

“

WELCOME. COME IN. PUT YOUR FEET UP ON THE FURNITURE.

— Scott Bradley

He also was an early adopter of recycled materials. In the Bradleys' home, the large beams in the interior rooms were repurposed from Fort Worth's Union Terminal (Texas and Pacific) station and post office buildings. Bricks came from a Fort Worth slaughterhouse. He incorporated doors with portholes from a ship. He liked to use Dutch doors, and there are many in the Bradleys' house. They were used to increase airflow in the days before air conditioning. The long stretch of rooms that lead from one room into the next without use of hallways was similarly a ventilation device so that breezes could flow unimpeded through the rooms.

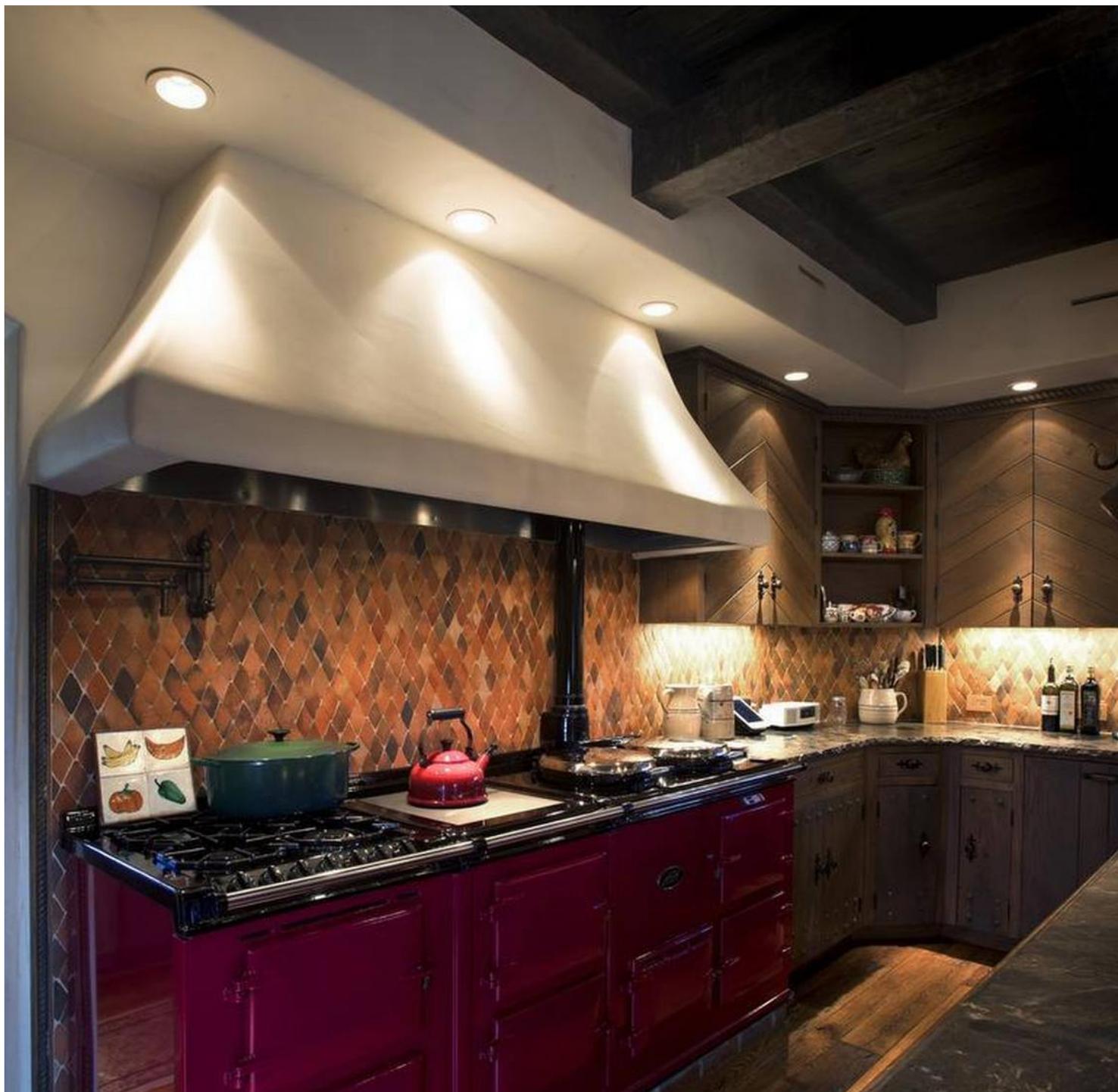


A Dealey bookcase in the lower level sitting/reading area.

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One of the most charming elements of a Dilbeck house is the whimsy he added. In the Bradleys' house there is a Harry Potter room under the staircase, built decades before the release of "Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone." The Bradleys have kitted it out in child-sized furniture and it has hosted many magical parties for grandchildren.

Up a steep staircase is Kelly's favorite room, a tiny, attic-shaped sanctuary comfortably large enough for only one person — a time-out room that is the fantasy of many stressed parents; a room for them, not the children. Kelly also has a well-used, cluttered office and a kitchen that boasts one of the largest and most expensive Aga stoves available. The commanding red British behemoth is impractical, as the ovens have to be on all the time, sending the summer temperature inside the kitchen rivaling that of the outdoors. To combat the heat and excessive energy waste, Kelly turns off the major unit and only uses the smaller Aga companion stove.





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For Scott, it is the humble spirit of the house that first attracted him. “It says, ‘Welcome. Come in. Put your feet up on the furniture,’ ” he says.

When the house was moved in 1997, it was plunked down in a former cow pasture. Ponds were dug and Scott planted trees. For years this was the extent of the landscaping. Two years ago, Elizabeth Smidt of Great Gardens in McKinney began a large landscaping project; a fountain was built in the circular entry court, along with a massive terrace out back.

Smidt could find no reference for a Dilbeck fountain in any of his existing structures. “Scott would not accept anything off the shelf. It had to be unique and interesting, as if Dilbeck had designed it,” says Smidt. After much consideration, she finally used Victorian lampposts and bowls of her own design to fit the Dilbeckian ethos.

The large, brick, multi-level terrace replaced a grass yard and rickety steps the owners had used for years. Because they entertain large groups, the stairs and grass were not hospitable to women in high heels, says Smidt, so the bricks smoothed that problem. There are large beds that get sun most of the day, and in those she planted what she calls her “tough stuff” — Black-eyed Susan and other *rudbeckia*, salvia, ice plant (*Delosperma cooperi*, a variety that withstands Texas summers), Indian hawthorn, daisy and summer phlox.

The Bradley's garden will be on the Garden Conservancy's Open Days tour, Sunday, Oct. 8. Visit gardenconservancy.org/open-days for more information.

While the house will not be open as part of the tour, the quintessential Dilbeck architecture will be readily apparent. Note the many chimneys (each one different), the bell tower, the combination stone, brick and stucco exterior walls, and the mullioned windows. It certainly isn't what most people would call a ranch house, but it is typically Dilbeck.

Gaile Robinson is a Fort Worth-based freelance writer.

The Garden Conservancy 2017 Open Days

Sunday, Oct. 8

10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Five gardens located in the cities of Keller,

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\$7 for each garden the day of the event

For advance ticket discounts, visit:

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The living room. **Paul Moseley** - pmoseley@star-telegram.com

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