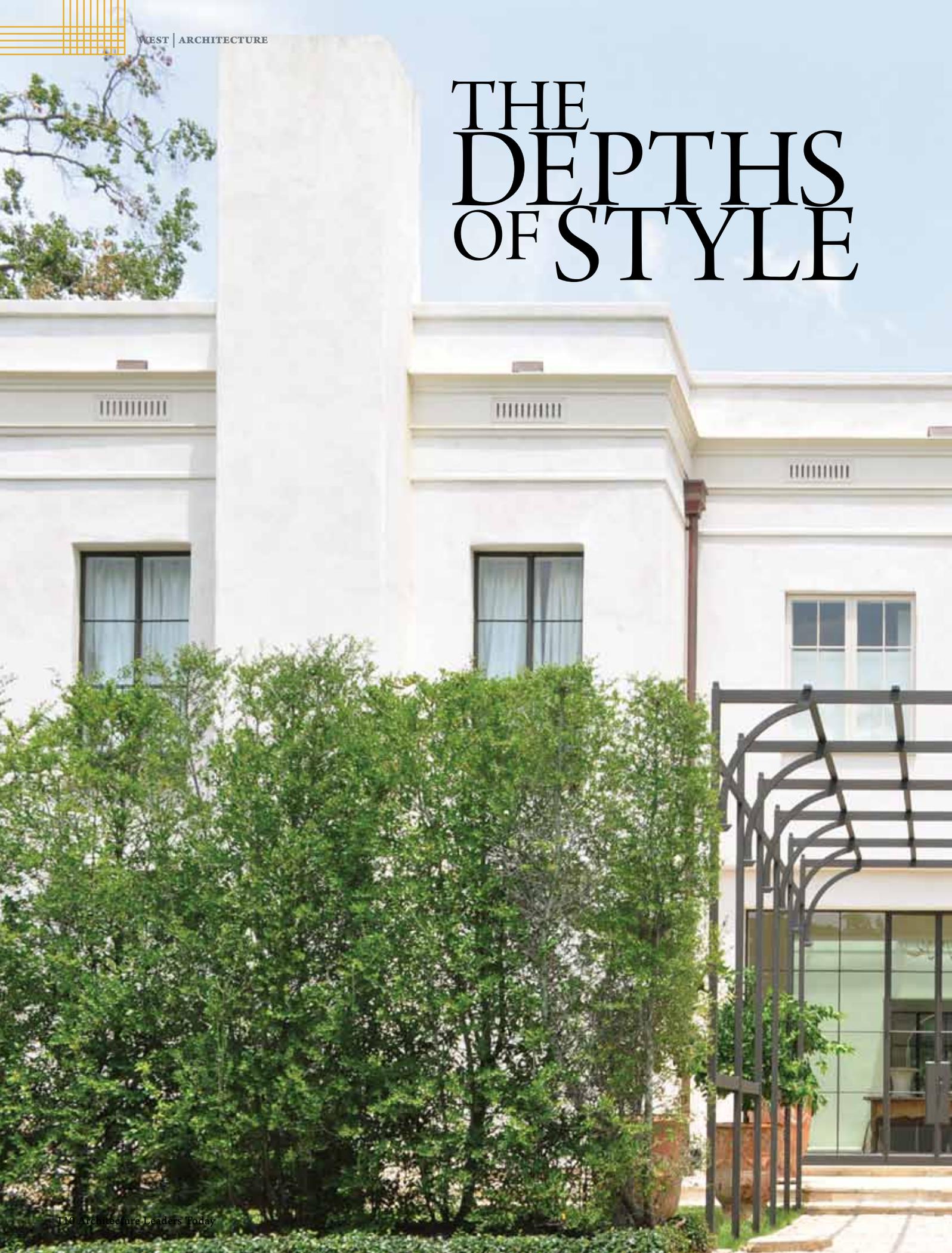




# THE DEPTHS OF STYLE





Miller Dahlstrand Architects has brought a blend of old styles, new elegance and astounding insight to the historic Houston landscape.

by Joel Cornell

Shadyside, Houston, Texas. Exterior view of the back of the house. Photo by Kevin Dahlstrand.



**THIS PAGE:** An interior shot of the kitchen at the Shadyside in Houston, Texas, shows how the architect used clean lines and rich materials to bring a sort of modern, old world, feeling to the home.

**OPPOSITE:** The staircase neatly connects the first floor with the second by way of a largely white palette.

Photos by Kevin Dahlstrand.





“I don’t really have a particularly exciting coming-of-age story,” said veteran architect Reagan Miller. “I grew up in Iowa farm country, so there weren’t a lot of architects or profound buildings that inspired me to get into architecture. If anything, it was my mother who first piqued my interest in architecture when she designed our house. I got it in my mind that architecture seemed like the thing to pick up and I haven’t been able to put it down since.”

After earning his Master’s degree in architecture from Rice University, Miller began working with established Houston architects Jay Baker and Kurt Aichler. In the mid 1990s, Miller began the process of opening his own firm, and it was Aichler who enabled this opportunity by forming a partnership that ultimately lead to greater client and contractor exposure. By 1997 Miller was able to begin his own firm.

While Miller never really had his sights set on his own firm, the community began to respond at large to Miller’s work and saw the meaningful future he could provide for his clients. Slowly but surely, Miller began to build up his firm from small projects, remodels, and new construction alike. At all times, Miller’s focus was on keeping things small.

“At the most we were just three people in those early years,” Miller said. “I realized that I couldn’t wear all the hats that were required to provide a good service.”

In 2006, Miller was joined by partner and fellow architect, Kevin Dahlstrand, as the firm rebranded into what it is today: Miller Dahlstrand Architects. Today, the firm consists of its two principals and is supported by four architecture graduates. This size, in Miller’s mind, is the ideal proportion. Any smaller and he would not have the time to tend to every single detail on every project, any larger and he would lose critical involvement.





“With the kind of work we do, high end residential mostly as a boutique firm of sorts, people want to work with the person whose name is on the door,” Miller said. “Success for us doesn’t mean being larger, it just means doing whatever it is you do with careful consideration for the details, for the clients, and for our partners in the industry.”

In catering to his client base, Miller’s work is largely influenced by style. For a new project, The Royden Oaks Residence in Houston, Miller worked closely with the client who sought a house that embodied a new, modern interpretation of traditional Latin American architecture. Unlike most of his projects, however, the Royden Oaks house was done as a spec building for a local developer.

“This client in particular was enamored with modernism, but with a warmer touch to it” Miller said. “For me, a touchstone in this house was the modernism I’ve seen across Latin America, which uses materials that are warm, such as wood, stone and clay, but all rendered in a crisp and more defined way. If there is at all a trend in the work that we do, it was embodied in this project. It’s that fine line between architecture that isn’t slavishly attached to the traditional and classical details, but still remains informed by them only to be rendered in a more modern way.”

Standing on a 64’ by 125’ lot, the house occupies 6,100 sq. ft. Miller created a shallow, U-shaped plan using a series of courtyards. While one side is

loaded with the garage, bedroom and kitchen, the other displays a marvelous transparency lengthwise through windows and pocket doors.

With such an emphasis on style and substance over trends and clichés, Miller was the ideal architect for a recently built home adjacent to the Houston Museum of Fine Arts – the Shadyside Residence. The 7,600 sq. ft. home sits in a historic area of the city.

“The client for the Shadyside project visited France quite often, in particular she frequently stayed at a hotel called La Miranda,” Miller said. “The hotel is an urban blocked building with a courtyard through the main entrance, and the client really wanted to emulate that feel. Over time, the hotel had placed a glass roof over the courtyard, and the unique blending of modern and traditional architecture was the seed for the Shadyside project.”

In spending much of her time in France, the client would frequently bring relics and antiques back to her Texas home. In seeking to reflect a traditional French style in a Houston neighborhood, the client and Miller worked together to obtain many of the materials used in the project from France. These included the flooring, the doors and the paneling, along with the clay tile roof. The floor plan is a simple one, “diagrammatic,” as Miller puts it.

“The intent was to create a story about the house, as if it had existed for a long time,” Miller said. “Over time, perhaps, people had come in an updated it, renovated it, and developed it. The

**OPPOSITE, TOP:** The interior view of the first floor sitting room of Shadyside in Houston, Texas uses a neutral palette to play up the lines of the room.

**OPPOSITE, BOTTOM:** The exterior view of the back and side of the house shows off the identical, modern chimneys.

**ABOVE, LEFT:** The stairway and hall on the second floor is sparse in terms of materials, but all the highest quality.

**ABOVE, RIGHT:** An exterior view of the guest house illustrates some of the manicured landscaping around the house.

Photos by Kevin Dahlstrand.





The new family room of River Oaks in Houston, sticks to brick, wood, glass and metal -- making for a warm and functional room. Photo by Mark Scheyer.





**THIS PAGE:** The exterior of the back of River Oaks illustrates how brick and wood work together harmoniously in the design.

**OPPOSITE:** The new dining room can accommodate all the residents for family dinners.

Photos by Mark Scheyer.



home has a very calm and collected quality to it with moments of modern intervention. It was an aesthetic that fit the antiques the client kept, but it could have easily worked beautifully with a more modern approach.”

For his Master’s degree, Miller focused on mid-century Houston architects and Frank Lloyd Wright devotees MacKie and Kamrath. As a result Miller became something of a local expert of the highly respected firm. It wasn’t long before one of MacKie and Kamrath’s Houston projects, River Oaks, needed to be renovated. Miller Dahlstrand Architects was promptly chosen as the architect to lead the historic renovation.

Originally designed in 1949, the River Oaks home saw only one addition, which was performed by the same firm in 1963. Miller was tasked with bringing to fruition a major addition and renovation that attempted to seamlessly integrate the inside with the outside.

“With this project and with most of our projects, we try and avoid that strict adherence to the period details,” Miller said. “But, in this setting, we were highly respectful when it came to the details, certain areas we didn’t touch at all. What the new home owners wanted was the crisp lines and the attention to detail that made this project modern. Outside of that, warm cozy aesthetics more common in traditional architecture remained throughout.”

With their heavy emphasis on a more referential approach to design, Miller Dahlstrand Architects has carved out a niche for itself. The firm continually seeks to challenge itself with sustainable architecture through historic renovation and community service involvement that will further engage the firm in Houston’s historic architectural landscape. *ALT*