

Jennifer Williams
likens the facade of
her steel-framed
Pierre Chareau-
inspired home to a
Mondrian painting.

THE glass HOUSE

With help from the legendary late French architect Pierre Chareau, design duo Jair Gonzalez and Jennifer Williams create a modern glass masterpiece in Westlake.

By Mimi Faucett // Photography by Saul Metnick

It started with a book. Well, more accurately, it started with a date. “After our first date, he had the book delivered to my apartment in New York City,” Jennifer Williams recalls of her then-courter, now husband architect Jair Gonzalez. “It was *La Maison de Verre*, about the Pierre Chareau house in Paris.” You know the house: voluminous, rule-breaking, constructed of mostly glass blocks and steel—a 20th century modernist marvel. “We both loved the house,” said Williams.

Four years later, that iconic house in the 7th arrondissement would inspire the design and build of Williams and Gonzalez’s three-bedroom, 3 ½-bath family home in Austin’s Westlake Hills.

The couple, now married with two toddlers in tow, have roots in Texas. So when they decided to start a family, relocating from New York City to Austin seemed like a natural choice. “We came here for the lifestyle,” says Williams, a statement not uncommon among the former city dwellers that flock to the state’s capital. They already owned a small lot in Westlake with easy access to Lake Austin, an ideal spot for the new build. Gonzalez is a seasoned architect, having worked under David

Kleinberg for nine years before starting his own design-build firm with Williams, Collaborated Works (*collaboratedworks.com*), in 2010. (The firm is co-located in NYC and Austin.) Williams, a former runway model, spearheads the interiors side of the business. According to Gonzalez, his wife's career in fashion "made her a natural editor when it came to understanding what was missing and what was frivolous."

And so, the two-year project began, with Gonzalez and Williams traveling back and forth from NYC to Austin to oversee construction. "We built it slowly," Williams recalls, citing the unusual pleasure of no clients and therefore no deadlines. The goal was not to replicate the famous glass house, but to emulate its lightness and transparency. Part of this was to take away any structural guesswork from the home,

so the architect intentionally left beams exposed inside to keep with this notion. Additionally, the home's steel frame is visible from the exterior, likening the facade, interspersed with glass, limestone and stucco, to a Mondrian painting.

Because the project was situated on a town-housestyle lot without much wiggle room for sprawl, they built up. The somewhat narrow three stories created an opportunity for the home's centerpiece: a staircase that weaves through the center of the residence. The hefty steel staircase was prefabricated and dropped in with a crane. But the result, which appears to be floating in some places, reads as more of a sculptural work than a functional element. In addition to the stairwell, the firm integrated a slew of custom pieces throughout the residence, including a pair of garage doors that swing



Clockwise from top: A faucet salvaged from George Gershwin's residence is used in the powder room; custom windows and doors by *themetaldoorcompany.com*, a branch of Collaborated Works, characterize the home; custom pieces, like a fixture crafted from old subway lights, are seen throughout the home.

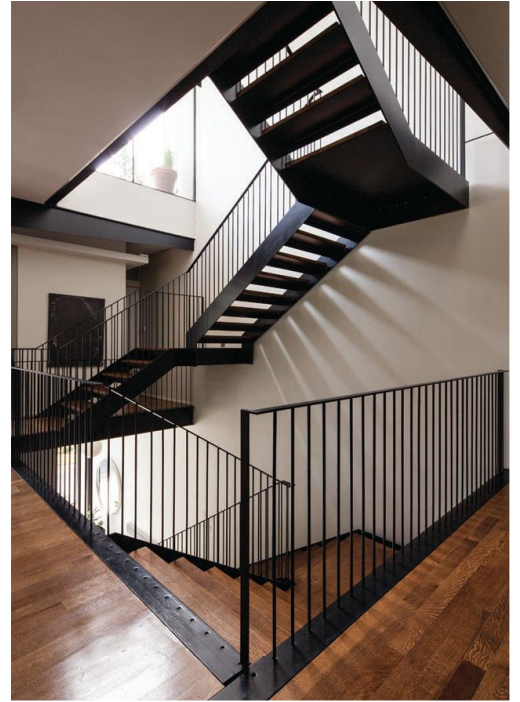


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—JENNIFER WILLIAMS »



DESIGN & REALTY
home



Clockwise from top left: A “Judd-esque” desk and daybed were custom made by Gonzalez; the home’s pièce de résistance is the prefabricated winding staircase; a stucco and steel fireplace marks the spacious living room; glass and steel create a sleek backdrop for a Traulsen refrigerator, vintage Russell range and Ventahood.



to the outside, reminiscent of Gonzalez’s grandfather’s home in Mexico City.

The couple knew they wanted a roomy, open floor plan to match their historical muse, and to contrast their cramped living quarters in Manhattan. They kept the interiors spare, bringing in minimal, thoughtful original art and furnishings. Hints at the couple’s tenure in New York City are seen throughout, as in a dining room chandelier comprised of vintage subway lights, and a bathroom fixture displaced from George Gershwin’s old residence. “When you build a home for yourself, without a client,” Williams says, “you get to express yourself as designers and show what you are all about.” ■