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# Arch Sophisticate

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In the 1960s, Philip Johnson designed a trophy house that evoked de Chirico by way of Dallas high society. More than four decades later, it has been meticulously restored, with a luxurious new landscape.

Of all the houses that Philip Johnson designed, perhaps none are as strangely fascinating as the one commissioned by Henry C. Beck Jr. and his wife, Patricia, in Dallas. The house, which was completed in 1964, is a 12,000-square-foot, two-story structure with a facade of tall, slender arches. A mega-version of the Lake Pavilion that Johnson designed on the grounds of his Glass House in New Canaan, Conn., the Beck House was one of several projects from that decade that prefigured his postmodern work, like the AT&T building, of the 1980s. There's something almost campy about the Beck house's grand proportions and the relentlessness of its arches, but the arches are impressive from without and frame romantic views of the house's six-and-a-half-acre site from within. A two-story atrium with a curved double staircase and a dining room that mimics the umbrella-vaulted interior of the Glass House's guest quarters only add to its allure.

The socially prominent Becks built their mansion as a showplace for entertaining, but the couple divorced in the early 1980s. In 2002 Mrs. Beck sold the house — which by then was showing its age — to a couple who owned another Modernist dwelling in Dallas. They loved the Beck house but knew that they and their children weren't going to live in it as the Becks had in their day. So they asked Mil Bodron and Svend Fruit of Bodron+Fruit, the Dallas architecture and interior design firm that renovated their previous house (and several other notable Modernist structures in Dallas), to undertake the delicate task of restoring and renovating the house without turning it into a time capsule. "Svend and I have learned that you can't make these houses too pure," Bodron said. "That guarantees they won't survive."

Fruit basically remade the north end of the house, which had contained an entertaining-scaled kitchen and a dark warren of servants' rooms, replacing it with a new kitchen, a family room and dining area, a guest room, and service and staff areas. Elsewhere, bathrooms were gutted, bedrooms were reconfigured, and the bronze and steel balustrades on the central stairs (just like the ones Johnson designed for the Four Seasons restaurant) were restored. Fruit also designed an elegant new pool pavilion with a flat concrete roof that seems to float above the glass-walled structure. It replaces one that was designed by Enslie Oglesby, a noted Dallas architect, but that had literally become a ruin, with trees growing up through it.

Bodron's design for the interiors followed the tone set by Johnson's travertine floors and walnut paneling. Neutral fabrics and carpets, and furniture by designers like William Haines, John Saladino, Joe D'Urso and Paul Laszlo, are consistent with Bodron's philosophy of using "the most beautiful nothing we can find." Johnson had always hoped that the Becks would collect art. They never did, but the current owners do, and

the neutral color scheme also creates a quiet background for works by artists like James Lee Byars, Ross Bleckner, Thomas Demand and John Chamberlain.

Bodron+Fruit's attention to detail, combined with its light touch, brought the house back to life. And the subtly luxurious landscape design, by Reed Hilderbrand, a firm in Watertown, Mass., gave the house a context that it never really had before. Much of the site was completely overgrown, and the house itself sat on a plinth that simply dropped off to the land behind it. Gary Hilderbrand, the principal in charge of the project, said, "We wanted to 'revise' the plinth so that the rest of the site didn't feel detached from the house." So now a series of cast-in-place concrete steps gently terraces the land. Existing plantings were edited to showcase the mature pecan and cedar elm trees on the property, while species like yaupon holly and Natchez crape myrtle were added. By creating a four-inch water basin, Reed Hilderbrand also turned an odd covered outdoor space that Mrs. Beck had used as a greenhouse into something more appealing. When the late-day light casts shadows of the arches on the water — which shimmers slightly, thanks to 12 jets installed in the basin — the effect is mesmerizing.

As Fruit said, the house is "a lot to get your head around as an architect." Like everyone involved in this project, though, he fell prey to its outsize charms and managed to make what could have been monumental and chilly into something that is as comfortable as it is glamorous.