



Photos courtesy of Rick Patrick.

# Ancient Oaks

## A Glorious Texas Restoration

by Lynne Christensen, CSSB's director of operations

*(Editor's Note: Lynne Christensen, the Cedar Shake & Shingle Bureau's director of operations has worked for the CSSB since 1998 and is involved in a variety of departments with a focus on marketing. Christensen holds a master of business administration degree as well as the Certified Association Executive credential.)*



notable Greek revival house is the centerpiece of this 200-acre family homestead east of Austin, Texas. Completed in 1857, the main house is nestled in a grove of ancient oaks. This project is teeming with history.

A.W. Hill came to Texas in 1835 with a

group of family and friends who settled in the area. Hill fought in the 1836 Battle of San Jacinto, helping to earn a critical victory in the Texas Revolution. In that same year, he acquired half a league of land, 2,200 acres, for cotton farming. Over the next 20 years the young entrepreneur and his wife, Evaline, lived in a modest log cabin. After they prospered, he was able to build her a grand Greek revival home, "The Big House." Graceful and elegant interior spaces created a harmonious blend with outdoor vistas that took advantage of the expansive, pastoral countryside surrounding the homestead.

In the years that followed, Ancient Oaks

would survive tense encounters with Indians and the Civil War. As it weathered these historical events, the family's fortunes also rose and fell. The family lost their home to the bank during the Great Depression.

### Respecting the Past

Fast forward to 1981. The current owners visited the property as newlyweds, eager to relive stories told to the owner by her grandmother, who originally learned them from her own father, the owner's great grandfather. The couple even found an overgrown cemetery that served as testament to the family's long standing associa-

tion with Ancient Oaks. Another 25 years passed. The present owners of Ancient Oaks used to live in California, but their dream to bring Ancient Oaks back into the family grew stronger with time. Eventually, they decided to move back to Texas, and made an offer to buy Ancient Oaks, which was not on the market at the time. Imagine their delight when their offer was accepted. And so began a labor of love that was to last six years.

No detail was overlooked, and the original character of the house was preserved. The finished home is a true testament to the Texans who built her, as well as to those who proudly maintain her heritage for future generations.

### Natural, Beautiful & Top Quality

The Certi-Split® Cedar Shake Roofing was selected for the new roof. The Cedar Shake and Shingle Bureau (CSSB) manufacturer selected was Anbrook Industries Ltd.



(Anbrook), Pitt Meadows, British Columbia, a longtime CSSB member. It is fitting that Anbrook was selected as the roofing product manufacturer; this particular company is a multi-generational family business and Anbrook's products are certified under the Sustainable Forestry Initiative Program. Premium Grade Certi-Split 18" x ½" hand split and re-sawn western red cedar shakes were installed with great success on the main house, as well as on the house addition. John Volz, AIA, of Volz & Associates, Inc., Austin, Texas, stated "positive previous experience with Certi-label™ products on restoration projects eliminated the need to look for any other roofing product."

### Major Challenge

Over the years, a great many areas of the main house had fallen into dis-repair. During the 20th Century, the house was vacant for some time. In addition to serving as a multi-generational family homestead, Ancient Oaks has also been featured in six movies. Thus the restoration work to be done included far more than mere cosmetic improvements to carpets and curtains. Complete structural stabilization was necessary from both a safety and a longevity

perspective. For example, the four original brick chimneys were restored to their original splendor. Prior to restoration, one chimney had collapsed and the other three had separated from the house. Thank goodness a complete dismantling was in order, for it was soon discovered that someone had bolted a portion to the house with steel anchors.

One detail to note is the use of computer modeling to design the exterior cornice and

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other missing historic architectural elements. The Volz team recreated the lost pieces by using a collection of 1930s Historic American Buildings Survey photographs (HABS), a good example of modern technology at work in architectural restoration. Local artisans with materials expertise and preservation experience were consulted throughout the project, especially on the custom millwork. Specialty compa-

nies provided everything from carpets to lace curtains and hand painting of reproduction roller shades. Wood is used extensively throughout the home, both inside and out.

The dedicated consulting team included: restoration architect: John Volz, AIA, LEED AP; decorative arts historian: Candace M. Volz, ASID; structural engineer: Patrick Sparks, P.E.; landscape architect: Catherine

O'Conner, RLA; contractor: Restorhaus, LP; craftsmen: Joe Tongate, Restorhaus, LP (wood repair); Peter Hausmann & Cynthia McMullen, Hausmann Walls (decorative finishes; graining, marbleizing, stenciling, wallpaper); and Teri Jefferson, Jefferson Art Lighting (reproduction solar light fixtures).

The owners' vision and dedication to historical accuracy made this project truly delightful. "The owners are great, fun clients and working on the Ancient Oaks project was such a privilege," said John Volz.

## Modern Lifestyle Blends with Traditional Design

In addition to reclaiming Ancient Oaks, the owners moved back to Texas to be near family in the Dallas/Fort Worth area and business interests. Both husband and wife maintain active home offices at the main residence. Accommodating necessary computer technology, therefore, was a prime consideration on this project. In order to minimize intrusiveness on the historical building fabric, wireless technology was installed throughout the main house and ancillary structures. Also, because Ancient Oaks is located in an area prone to wildfires, the owners installed a residential sprinkler system; recessed sprinkler heads and custom colors on the caps helped camouflage the system within the historic-design elements.

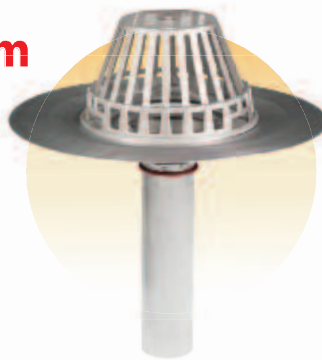
## Energy Efficiency Needs

Certi-label cedar roofs are well known for their insulating qualities, helping to keep the home warmer in the winter and cooler in the summer, naturally, and with less energy usage than other products. The restored window blinds, also known as *shutters*, are fully functional, opening and closing to control sunlight. Window film was used to prevent fading of furniture, accessories, and fabrics. New insulation and air infiltration barriers were installed under the

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re-used original siding that was supplemented with new matching siding as needed. A two-speed geothermal system was installed and gently concealed. Native plants were carefully arranged around the site to re-establish a natural prairie that once surrounded the house. Rainwater is collected for watering cattle.

### A Treasured Site

Today, Ancient Oaks is proving popular with community residents. It has been the venue for a Christmas fundraiser for the Bastrop County Historical Society. Ample space and guest quarters allow for large family gatherings and invitations to a myriad of



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friends. A casual elegance pervades the restored homestead, and this style reflects the good-natured spirit found throughout Bastrop County. The recent wildfire storm through the Lost Pines forest that devastated Bastrop County also caused widespread concern about Ancient Oaks. The fire burned 40,000 acres and 1,700 structures; it came within half a mile of the home. Complete strangers, worried about the restored property, telephoned to see if Ancient Oaks withstood the wildfires, further underscoring the appreciation that Bastrop County has for its history. The owners took comfort in the fact that they had chosen a fire-retardant treated Certi-Split shake roof for an added level of protection.



### Living History

There is a wonderful sense of peace and serenity at Ancient Oaks. The property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places and is a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark. Today, Ancient Oaks proudly displays the area's heritage as well as the owners'

deeply rooted love for their home. Strength, vision, and determination, no doubt passed down from ancestors who built the homestead, are evident in the finished project. Ancient Oaks demonstrates that rebuilding the past, although time consuming, is eminently possible and is quite frankly, a beautiful *site* to see. **AW**



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