



Photos by Danielle Lochte Photography

In the living area, wooden slats reach to the vaulted ceiling, which is lined with nickel gap wood slats. A granite fireplace at the other end separates it from the kitchen.

Meanwhile, back at the ranch, couple realize they’re home

Charms of Hill Country and their high-end vacation getaway so captivate homeowners, they choose to retreat from the big city

By Richard A. Marini
STAFF WRITER

Before he married his wife, Ashley, Chris Nardiello was what he wryly calls a “gentleman rancher,” owning 105 acres of land outside Houston. Although he eventually sold the ranch, he says he enjoyed the life-style.

“So one day, after Ashley and I got married, I saw a commercial on TV for Boot Ranch,” he said, referring to the high-end, golf and luxury home community just north of Fredericksburg. “When I suggested we check it out, her immediate response was ‘I don’t want to live on a ranch.’ I had to explain to her that Boot Ranch wasn’t *that* kind of ranch.”

After touring the development and falling in love with its gently rolling hills, championship golf course and clubhouse, and family-friendly lakeside amenities, they purchased a 1.7-acre lot, where they planned to build a vacation getaway.

It was about this time, while at a “local establishment” in Fredericksburg, that the Houston couple met Matthew Lines and his wife, Jessica. The couples got to talking and learned that Lines is the principal of Fredericksburg-based Tandem Building Corp., so they hired him to remodel a project they already owned in town.

One thing led to another, and they eventually hired him again to build their Boot Ranch home.



The back kitchen has space for pantry items, a refrigerator and freezer, a second dishwasher and a coffee maker. The kitchen area was designed to prevent guests from congregating.

Construction on the six-bedroom, five-bathroom house began in July 2023 and was completed in February 2025.

Once the home was completed, they decided they liked it so much they sold their house in Houston and rented an apartment there. They now spend about three-quarters of their time in Boot Ranch.

“Ashley likes living in a ranch now,” Nardiello said with a smile.

During the design process, they decided they wanted something different from most Boot Ranch residences, which tend to have large, open “great rooms” that combine the functions of a living room, family room, dining room and kitchen into one central space.

“We wanted something with more intimacy and character,” explained Nardiello, a financial planner.

They accomplished this in several ways, most notably with the large, two-sided natural gas fireplace between the kitchen and the living area.

“The fireplace serves as a definite delineation between the two spaces,” Lines said.

It’s also something of a sculptural art piece. Instead of following the traditional limestone-and-mortar Hill Country playbook, the fireplace has black reeded wood slats above and below a deep-black granite surround.

“We had to build it from the floor up because these bottom slats support this ledge, and then the granite sits on top of that,” Lines explained. “It’s a beautiful finished product, but it was kind of a process to get

Ranch continues on C3

Prevention, intervention best medicine for vet bills

A common refrain I hear from pet owners is, “Why has veterinary care become so expensive?”

Like many things in health-care, rising veterinary costs are the result of several changes that have been building for years.

For starters, today’s veterinarians can diagnose and treat conditions that would have been impossible to treat a generation ago. Digital imaging, advanced surgery, dental radiography, cancer treatment, rehabilitation and sophisticated laboratory testing often require expensive equipment, continuing education and highly



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ANIMALS MATTER

medical supplies to laboratory services, rent, insurance, utilities, equipment and employee wages, nearly every expense has increased.

Our pets are living longer, too. Better nutrition and preventive care mean more dogs

trained staff.

Like many healthcare providers, veterinary practices — both for-profit and nonprofit — have seen operating costs climb across the board. From medications and

and cats are reaching their senior years. That’s wonderful news, but it also means more pets require ongoing treatment for arthritis, heart disease, kidney disease, diabetes, cancer and other chronic conditions.

Another challenge is a nationwide shortage of veterinarians. Many practices struggle to recruit and retain qualified professionals, driving up labor costs while making appointments more difficult to obtain in some communities.

Finally, there is a growing conversation about the changing ownership of veterinary practices. A recent PBS News-

Rosenthal continues on C3



Maskot/Getty Images

Many conditions that plague pets are less expensive and much easier to treat when they first appear.

RANCH

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there.”
The adjacent kitchen was designed to be a working space, so it’s also a bit more intimate than it otherwise could have been.

The couple loves to entertain, but Ashley, a part-time hairstylist who handles the couple’s real estate investment, wanted to discourage guests from congregating in the kitchen, so the quartzite-topped island has an overhang that seats only four.

“That was one of Ashley’s ideas,” Nardiello said. “She was really instrumental in creating a lot of these details, gathering them from the inspiration pictures she collected over the years.”

Another of her ideas: The large picture window behind the sink that overlooks the backyard and the hills beyond makes doing the dishes less of a chore.

“We placed large windows throughout the house to capture the views,” he said.

Behind the stove area is a back kitchen that not only has plenty of room for pantry items, it’s also large enough to accommodate a refrigerator and freezer column set, a second dishwasher and what Nardiello called a “critical” coffee maker.

Another way they discourage guests from con-



Photos from Danielle Lochte Photography
The entrance to the dining room is flanked by glass-enclosed wine storage spaces where bottles rest on wires so thin, they appear to be floating.

gregating in the kitchen is to offer them even more pleasant spaces to gather. One of those is the formal-yet-comfortable dining room adjacent and two steps up from the kitchen.

The room is lined with custom millwork-paneled walls, painted white. The work was so complex it required almost a month of skilled carpentry to complete.

Flanking the dining room entry are two glass-enclosed wine storage spaces, each side holding almost three dozen bottles lying horizontally on wire racks so thin they appear to be floating.

“We were walking through the house right be-

fore it was about to be dry-walled when Ashley said, ‘Do you know what would be cool? If we made this space into wine storage,’ ” he recalled. “It all turned out fabulous, and we’re so glad we did it because it opened up more space and gave the home another point of visual interest. I think it looks like an art installation.”

The primary bedroom is of medium size, which is something of a trend in new homes these days.

“We’re seeing that evolve as people move away from big bedroom suites, with seating alcoves reading nooks and work-out spaces,” Lines said. “People are starting to un-

derstand they need only a bed and maybe a dresser and nightstand. They’d rather use that space elsewhere.”

They did, however, take steps to make the room feel larger than it is. They vaulted the ceiling, for example, lining it with nickel gap wood slats to intensify the impression of height and openness, and they installed a fireplace with a thin stone surround that barely projects out into the room like a traditional one.

Double doors into the suite bathroom make entering the space feel like a special event, as does the intricately patterned marble tile floor and the handsome, wood-paneled back-



The compact kitchen was built for working, not socializing. The island seats only four.



The bar top in the publike den is a translucent natural quartzite. It’s backlit for a warming glow.

splash.

“That’s what we were trying to capture,” Nardiello said. “We spend so much time in the bathroom, getting ready in the morning and winding down as night. Why not make it feel special?”

Elsewhere, another spot for guests to congregate is the cozy den off the living room. Down a few steps, it feels like a Scottish pub,

with real woodgrain wall covering, a digital dartboard and a bar top of translucent natural quartzite that’s backlit for a warming, welcoming glow.

“We love to come down here before dinner, after dinner, or on Saturdays to watch college football or other sports,” Nardiello said.

Now, that’s the ranch life.

ROSENTHAL

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Hour report examined the increasing number of veterinary hospitals being acquired by large corporations and private equity-backed organizations, raising questions about how consolidation may affect pricing, competition and access to care.

Many independent practice owners receive

lucrative offers to sell their hospitals. Critics worry that consolidation may be reducing competition and contributing to higher prices.

Together, these changes are reshaping not only what veterinary care costs, but who can afford it.

When families can’t afford basic veterinary care, the consequences extend beyond the exam room. Pets are surren-

dered to shelters, abandoned, left untreated or euthanized because care is out of reach. Animal shelters become more crowded, rescue organizations become overwhelmed, and communities ultimately bear the emotional and financial costs.

There may never be a single solution, but there are meaningful steps pet owners can take to help keep veterinary care more

affordable.

First, don’t wait. Ear infections, dental disease, skin problems and many other conditions are often far less expensive, and much easier on your pet, to treat early rather than after they have become emergencies.

Second, invest in preventive care. Take advantage of free and low-cost vaccination clinics and affordable spay/neuter programs whenever

possible. Preventive care is almost always less expensive than emergency treatment.

Finally, if your pet does become ill, talk openly with your veterinarian about costs. Find out which tests or procedures are essential today, whether there are equally effective lower-cost options to consider first or whether treatment can safely be completed in stages. Most veterinarians

understand that families have budgets and will work with you.

As veterinary medicine continues to advance, prevention and early intervention remain two of the most effective ways to protect both your pet’s health and your budget.

Send your pet questions, tips and stories to cathy@petpundit.com. Follow her at [@cathymrosenthal](https://twitter.com/cathymrosenthal).



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