

The corner of the large porch on Charles and Susie McVea's home outside Comfort features a modified ramada. Small cedar logs cover the porch, screening out harsh sunlight.

# NATURAL COUNTRY

## HOUSE RULES

### Practical pays off in home design

When Charles and Susie McVea mapped out their house near Comfort, they put a premium on practicality. They share design tips and pointers they learned in the process.

### VIRTUAL REALITY

"After the plans have been drawn up, artificially put yourself in a virtual house and look for every single light switch, where it is, what light it's going to turn on," says Charles. Envisioning day-to-day life in the planning phase can help avoid oversights, such as a shortage of electrical outlets or poorly placed light switches, that could become daily irritations once you're living in the house.

### SENSIBLE ARRANGEMENT

The McVeas defied convention by placing their laundry room near their bedroom so they don't have to drag laundry through the house. It makes sense for the empty nesters, while a centralized utility room might serve families better.

### PICTURE THIS

Charles advises homeowners to photograph the construction in phases, from the plumbing pipes in the foundation up. Get photos of heat and air ducts and wiring. "Once the walls are closed in, you don't know where anything is," he says. "If anything really major goes wrong, unless you have those pictures, you really don't know where the pipes are, where the wires are and so forth."

### PAY THE PRICE

"Spend your money getting what you want instead of saying, 'I can always change it out later,'" says Susie. "Get the fixtures you want."

### SURVIVAL STRATEGIES

Charles McVea advocates propane heat over electric heat. "If the electricity goes off, you have propane." The McVeas also have a gravity water system, so they don't rely on an electric pump to get water from their well to the house. "You've got to think like a farmer or rancher, you've got to survive by yourself when the wheels fall off."

— Chrissie Murnin



PHOTOS BY DANIEL WARNER/SPECIAL TO THE EXPRESS-NEWS

The 'quiet side' of the McVeas' living room features a comfortable seating area around a limestone fireplace. The fireplace has a cedar mantel and is flanked by bookcases. A kiva ladder leans to the right of the fireplace.

## Rural home brings best of the outdoors inside

By CHRISSIE MURNIN

SPECIAL TO THE EXPRESS-NEWS

Charles and Susie McVea combined cedar, stucco and limestone with their love of Mexico, the Texas Hill Country and New Mexico to produce their retirement home nestled in the hills outside Comfort.

A courtyard with a fountain graces the front entrance. Polished split-cedar posts trim the wooden front doors from Mexico as well as the garage doors and the corners of the stucco house. Hill Country limestone frames a cathedral window bearing stained-glass crosses.

As outdoor lovers, the McVeas wanted to bring the outside in by using limestone floors, natural light, a cathedral ceiling, natural adobe-colored stucco and a lot of plants. "The original concept was supposed to emulate a courtyard in a hacienda, hence the stucco walls and things of that nature. And it's also the reason for the windows up there," says Charles, pointing to high windows in the dining area.

The McVeas originally planned to have a wooden floor, but cost and other factors led them to compromise on limestone flooring. Their builder, Steve Kostantenaco, found mason Francisco Guerrero to create the flooring.

"They just had a huge pile of ground-up limestone that they mixed with something — it's supposed to be a secret — and then he applied it onto the concrete and it's about this thick," says Susie, holding her fingers apart just over half an inch. "It's thicker than tile."

The main area features what the McVeas have dubbed the "noisy corner" and the "quiet corner." On the noisy side of the room are a sectional sofa and the television, where Charles and grandsons watch football.

Diagonally opposite that is the quiet side, where Susie enjoys chatting with friends. A seating group is arranged around the fireplace, which features a cedar



A birdhouse in the shape of a church rests atop a wooden checkerboard at the McVeas' home in the Hill Country.