Summers' Camp
Rob Brinkley Gets Inside the Dallas Arboretum's Hot House

Plus
Spring Design Fling: Home notes from hither and yon
Camp: Revamp

Wherein the Dallas Arboretum wisely calls in the one person who loves the Camp Home — and the work of its Texas architect — as much as Margaret McDermott herself, who spearheaded its first renovation in the 1980s: chic, sleek decorator Emily Summers. Hey, after 20-plus years facing the public, you’d need a little lift, too.

BY ROB BRINKLEY PHOTOGRAPHY STEVE WRUBEL
FLORAL DESIGN DAVE FOREHAND AND JIMMY TURNER, COURTESY DALLAS ARBORETUM. STYLING LIBBY DUNN.
Oh, and it just happens to function as workspace for a few Dallas Arboretum managers and staff; who have offices on second floor, in former bedrooms. In other words, unlike the DeGolyer house down the way—which is open for tours daily as the former showplace of geologist Jettie DeGolyer and his society wife Netta—the Camp Home has no function as a real, cellular place. And look good doing it.

Enter Summers, who is quick to tell you this was not some-endearing Cinderella act. Sumners and her project managers Kimberly Barrett and Libbie Dunn started working on this in the "90s," she says, as she adjusts a potted orchid. "It's been an evolution—and a bit of a challenge." She points out specific features of the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 18
The spacious dining room was already in place. So Summers' job, as she sees it, was in the "history" of the house, which meant repopulating pieces that should stay or replacing worn rugs with sensitively updated ones. "And then," she says, "the glam in her eye as she singled out a few kilometers away, "we broke loose a little." And that means an infusion of fresh pieces from a 1930s Deco table topped with pale granite to a 1970s French mirror bordered in mirrored circles to a long, high-backed Andriu Putnam sofa designed in 2001. Mississouri accomplished. Of the redecoration, Margaret McDermott says, "It's just magic, it's splendid!"

Indeed, Summers' hyper-elegant eye has brought an exciting, elevated vibe to the house, and it reads — as you can see — like a fine, private home filled with beautiful things, not a public space where computer keyboards clack away and phones ring all day.

Not that the Camp house minds, mind you. We think it known that it's in very good hands.

Off to Camp:

Architect John Staub and his finest Dallas commission

Just as the motto 'Camp House' is to any of Dallas A-list design types and preparers for the Cup of the house — words like "quiet," "handsome" and "relaxed." Emily Summers, who has lectured about the classic design type and prepared for the Cup — its history, is usually attended. It emanates from a Texas that is missing in the fast-food cushions and buffet that pangs even Dallas best neighborhoods. Said on what would be the 22-acre estate of real estate developer Alex Summers and his wife Robyn, the house is a small distillation of Latin Colonial, English Regency and Art Deco — solid architecture, but not filled, as it did for phalanx of William and Jane Hoope and other top families in Houston, mostly in River Oaks.

The Camp House was built for $500,000 and boasts floor-to-ceiling windows that extract on into its thick walls, opening the room to the views and breezes of White Rock Lake. But the Camps had about the time the house was completed. Mrs. Camp never finished decorating it, reportedly in the 1980s. Texas Industries chairman Ralph Rogers rescued the house from an unknown fate in 1978. He held the until 1992, the National Society paid it off in 1982, merging it with the neighboring 48-acre DeGolyer estate to eventually become the Dallas Arboretum. The four-year renovation of the Camp house had already started in 1979, with funds committed by Margaret McDermott. Mrs. Camp was a friend of mine," McDermott says, "talking great and obvious pride in the way she had her house looking today. Ever to see it for real, you won't forget it. It's not open for tours a little the DeGolyer house, but its first floor and gardens can be rented for weddings, receptions, parties and, as the Dallas Arboretum charmingly puts it, is "other festive occasions." You can certainly think of a few.
“We had to honor the historical — and then we broke loose a little.”

— decorator Emily Summers