

Julia Dodd Starts From Scratch In Oak Cliff

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Age of Enlightenment

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For most of us, if we are blessed, life presents a moment of clarity. Sooner or later, we are hit by an illuminating bolt of realization that we are frauds. We have been living someone else's life, wearing her clothes, living in her rooms, doing her work. We have lost ourselves, if we ever knew us.

BACK TERRACE: This room was enclosed with windows and decorated with natural elements such as slate, a petrified and polished teak table, and decorative stone. Rattan furniture by Walters Wicker, N.Y. It's Julia Dodd's favorite.

Furniture in living room by Ligne Roset. Big windows are kept bare to show off the outside landscape. (Left) Burmese ceremonial bowl is highlighted because of its sculptural shape; a petrified piece of ebony from Big Mango furthers the naturalistic theme.

For Julia Dodd, the moment came later. For more than 20 years, she had hauled the family inheritance from Tennessee to California, then to Kentucky and South Carolina, and finally to Texas, where she unloaded in a traditional-style house in Highland Park. Dodd's furnishings – a sizable collection of antique furniture, Oriental rugs, china, and silver – came saddled with the kind of familial provenance that makes you feel like you owe them something. Most of the antiques had come from her grandmother, a woman who crossed the country in a covered wagon. She had been trained in music at the Boston Conservatory, had become a concert violinist, and had

learned to speak seven languages. She was progressive, yet she wore a whalebone corset until age 93. The family history was inexorably tied to the many things that filled Dodd's house, and taking care of them was an honor. But it was also a burden.

A practicing lawyer and a pharmacist with four degrees, Dodd was heir to her grandmother's intellect and strong spirit. As independent and learned as she might be, Dodd was bound by the material things she had inherited. A closet minimalist, she yearned to be free. "I would see a sleek interior and long for it," she says. "I had purchased contemporary art for my office, and it had a quieting effect. But when I came home at night to all these things, I couldn't rest."

A year and a half ago, she bought a house in Oak Cliff, amid a thicket of trees atop a stony hill, which reminded her of her Tennessee childhood. Dodd hired Loyd Taylor of Loyd-Paxton Inc., known for opulent room designs, to find a way to squeeze the antiques into the house's small rooms.

SITTING ROOM: An unusual pair of Dogon tribal wooden artifacts from the estate of Tony Duquette make extraordinary room dividers. In place of a dining room table, Julia Dodd chose to have an ottoman for extra seating off the living area. A vintage metal chest carries out the stainless steel elements in the living room and kitchen. Chunks of minerals serve as art, and on the wall is a painting by Arie Van Selm of Gerald Peters Gallery.

KITCHEN: The narrow kitchen is original in size and shape, and serves as a passage between the main area of the house and back terrace. While most would have opened the kitchen up, Dodd loved the small size. "You have to keep an open mind. Some of the things you think won't work turn out to be the best," Loyd Taylor says. A stainless steel work table and appliances contrast beautifully with old wooden chairs. Though not pictured, Dodd's grandmother's ox yolk hangs like sculpture on one end.

Taylor had a different idea. "As I got into the project, I kept listening to her," he says. "If you listen, people tell you what they want without actually telling you. What I heard was that she didn't really want the things she had. She couldn't admit it to herself."

Taylor suggested she keep a few family possessions and sell the rest. With the money from the sales she could buy what she liked. An obvious solution, but to Dodd, it was a revelation. "It was like a release," she says. "I had been the caretaker of all this stuff, and I never really enjoyed it. I was afraid to use the china. I was afraid someone would steal the silver. My parents would not have wanted me to be burdened like this. Once I realized I didn't have to keep it, I was free."

She placed an ad in the paper for a garage sale, which she wittily dubbed a “Highland Park Identity Estate Sale.” As each piece left, she found a little more of herself. Dodd

BACK YARD: The house, set on 1.5 acres of terraced land, was originally part of a 10-acre estate. Its many small rooms were gutted and opened up with views to a wooded vista. Antique Chinese chairs and terra cotta statues on terrace.

kept a handful of prized objects, including her great-grandfather’s books and an old wooden yoke, worn by an ox that had pulled her grandmother’s covered wagon.

It’s ironic – or maybe poetic – that a decorator known for creating lavish interiors would be the catalyst for Julia Dodd’s metamorphosis into minimalism. But like all good decorators, Loyd Taylor is part-therapist and part-spiritual medium, summoning his clients’ most buried desires. Besides, he hates clutter. Even in the most opulent rooms, the eye must have some rest, he says. “No matter what we design, our work has clean lines,” he continues. “We don’t do superfluous. Everything gets used.”

The house, built in 1944, had originally been divided into many awkward, small rooms during the years, so it was gutted to open it up. “The house did not have great architecture, but its position on the land was exciting,” Taylor says. Set on an acre and a half, the property stair steps into a creek with three terraces, which were uncovered when Dodd had the overgrowth removed. Large picture windows, devoid of shades or draperies, are like paintings of the outdoors. Said to be the highest point in Dallas, the land falls within a migratory path for more than 50 species of birds. “The house invites you outside into nature,” Dodd says.

SIDE ENTRY: A pagoda lit with candles provides a dramatic entrance.

The exterior of the house is clad in shellstone, and Taylor used stone and other natural elements as a theme throughout. Chunks of petrified and polished ebony, agate, and teak became side tables. Natural mineral specimens were placed like sculpture on tables, and two ancient Dogon tribal wood pieces from the estate of Tony Duquette serve as room dividers in the living room. The floors in the living room are ash-stained white oak, while the rest of the house was laid with slate. Floors, like windows, are bare. There’s brushed steel and glass in the living room, baths, and kitchen, and rattan furniture and exposed beams in the back terrace room. Upholstered furniture, all from Ligne Roset, is spare, covered in textured natural cotton. “It’s a minimalist feel, without the minimalism. It looks clean and spare because of the selection of the pieces and the way they were placed,” Taylor says.

The house is a peaceful spirit that feeds Dodd’s soul. “Right now, as I’m talking to you, the light is streaming through the windows. It’s very soothing,” she says. A new house is being built next door, and she believes the owners must have chosen the spot

for many of the reasons she did. “There are places people think you should live, such as the Park Cities. But this is a place where people *want* to live.”