

Houston CityBook

Fall 2006
Premier Issue

**HOUSTON
ROCKS!**
Cammie
Gilbert,
Heavy Metal
Sweetheart

UH'S
HIGH-TECH
HUNT *for the*
LOST CITY
of the
MONKEY
GOD

SEXY
'70s-CHIC
FALL
FASHION

GREEK
FEST
AT 50

LEE
ELLIS
2.0

THE
ALLEY'S
SHAKESPEARE
STUDS

PLUS

'Deepwater Horizon'
Micaiah Walker
Tilman Fertitta
& Everything
You Never Knew
About Beyoncé



*"Life is rich, beauty
is everywhere, every
personal connection has
meaning and laughter is
life's sweetest creation."
—SUSAN SMITH JONES*

Oxford Calling

In a posh Tanglewood bachelor pad, a developer channels college glory days with party savvy and good “Ole” Southern style.

By Chris Kelly,
Photos by Julie Soefer



In Living Color
Blake Tart III's living room, designed by his sis Courtney Elias, boasts saturated shades throughout. Deep-blue velvet chairs sit across from a masculine leather sofa, and a custom painting hangs above the mantle.





B

lake Tarrt III is always smiling. And why shouldn't he be? "I've never had a bad day in my life," declares the fourth-generation Houstonian and reputed host with the most. The exuberant Tarrt, 55, is as well known for being a visionary commercial real estate developer and the president and CEO of New Regional Planning as he is for throwing a great party.

And so, not surprisingly, when it comes to his 5,400-square-foot, two-story white-brick Tanglewood home, put together beautifully by his designer sister Courtney Tarrt Elias, he says it's "one-hundred

percent about entertaining ... with a feeling of New South." (Elias' home is featured in "Family Style" in this issue.)

Tarrt's always loved a good party, and the South. He grew up in River Oaks, but when it came time for college, he headed to the University of Mississippi. "When I was a senior in high school, my father took me to Ole Miss for the Sigma Chi Derby Day, and that was it for me!" The young man fell in love with the Southern charm of Oxford, where he now owns a second home, and made a name for himself on campus in the '80s for organizing phenomenal theme parties — "I built go-go cages



d recreated *Animal House*,” he muses—that, to this day, are annual traditions. “The stories about Blake are legendary,” says Buckner Corso, newly minted Ole Miss graduate and Sigma Chi brother. “One day he filled the whole Sigma Chi house with sand for a beach party. The housemother almost killed him because it took about 10 years to get all of the sand out!” And a couple of years ago, Tartt threw what the Oxford Press dubbed as “the biggest tailgate party in Mississippi.” On the evening before the Ole Miss vs. UT football game, Tartt put on an extravaganza that included a >

Lighten Up

Opposite page: Floor-length teal curtains add a pop of color to an otherwise light, bright dining room. Above: The kitchen, where Tartt does a lot of entertaining, boasts four brass barstools and a backsplash of patterned tiles that extends all the way to the ceiling.

> live band, Ole Miss cheerleaders leading a private pep rally, lots of local cuisine and plenty of booze.

Naturally, when it came time to design his own home, creating a great space for entertaining was a priority. So the self-described “bachelor who hasn’t finished dating” turned to his younger sister to spearhead the design. And Courtney Tarrt Elias of Creative Tonic delivered.

The spacious living room interprets Southern comfort as a deep, beige leather Chesterfield sofa. A colorful abstract painting by the late abstract master Dan Christensen, with his vibrant, fun-loving colors of yellow and green, hangs over the fireplace, echoed in a custom rug. Bookshelves on either side of the fireplace are backed with evocative blue and gold wallpaper that resembles the marbled paper found on the pages of antique books. Elias also designed a setup for Tarrt’s vinyl record collection so that Tarrt and his guests can get into the party mood with a heavy dose of vintage soul, blues and, naturally, Elvis.

The nearby powder room is pure Oxford. Tarrt commissioned Houston muralist Leslie Segreto to create a dream-like Mississippi collage with a riverboat, azaleas and the woods leading up to the home of Oxford-reared author William Faulkner, who once famously noted, “If Oxford were ever taken away, the universe itself would collapse.”

The dining room, the scene for formal affairs, sports a sleek brass-inlaid dining table—and an antique gilded mirror that belonged to Tarrt’s grandmother set rather glamorously upon a mirrored wall. Louis XI chairs and framed family portraits hanging on the walls project a sense of old-school Southern gentility and family heritage. And yet glimpses of Tarrt’s fun-loving, modern lifestyle are close, as well: The dining room overlooks a brick-paved courtyard with a swimming pool, where a row of flames dramatically dances atop the length of a water wall. There’s also an outdoor cigar lounge and dining area, along with a flat-screen TV and barbecue. “I like having my friends over for cookouts,” he says. “I’m pretty good at grilling steaks.”

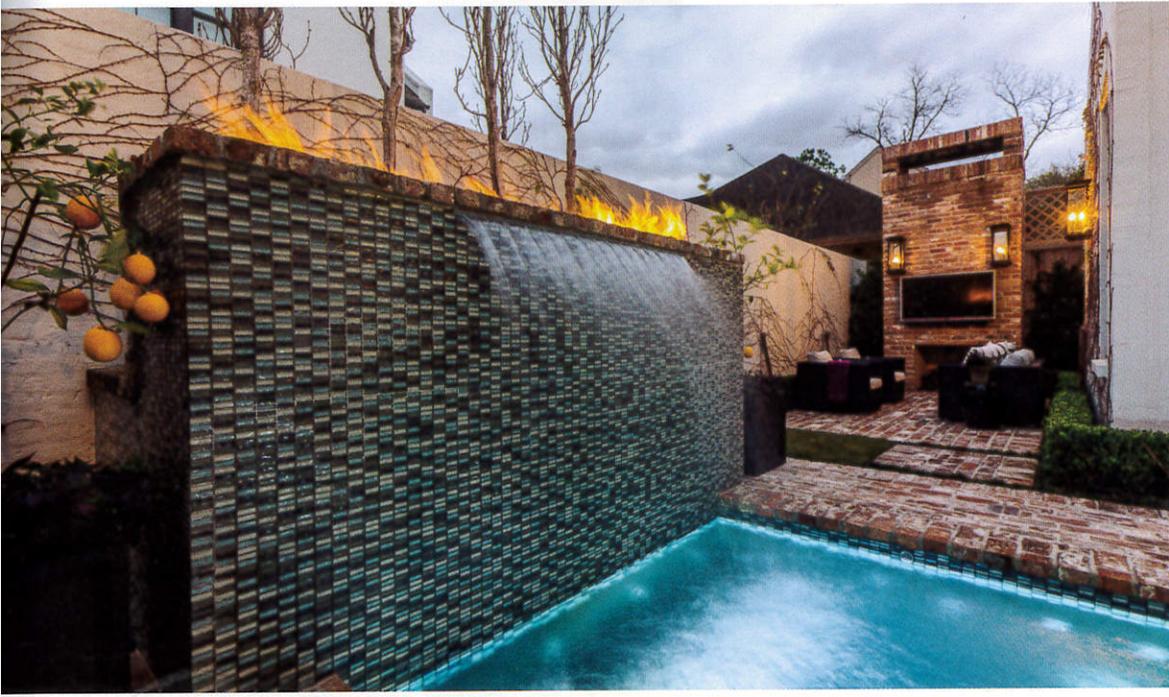
For more entertainment, Tarrt and his guests sometimes go up to the second floor, where there is an elegant combination billiard-media-wine room. There are custom jade mohair sofas, a pool table and a huge, purple-fringed ottoman, and Elias designed a brick barrel-vaulted wine area with New Orleans-style gas lamps and a mahogany wine-tasting table. An amethyst Murano glass chandelier hangs overhead.

Not that Tarrt is all-play-and-no-work. Far from it. His commercial real estate portfolio includes properties such as Post Oak Plaza, Memorial City Mall and Northline Commons. He’s director of the Houston Police Foundation, and is an avid supporter of MFAH and Houston Livestock Show & Rodeo. He also has several projects in Oxford, and serves as president of the Ole Miss School of Business Real Estate.

For all his parties and business interests, though, he finds time for family. He says that often, late at night, after a long day at work capped by an impromptu social gathering at his place, when he’s alone at last, he texts his sister the same simple message: “I love my house.” ■



Behind the Eight-Ball
Tarrt and his designer sister created an area made for entertaining, with a pool table, big-screen TV and wine-tasting alcove. The second-floor billiard's room is a houseguest favorite.



Host With the Most
From far left: The ceiling of Tartt's expertly organized and color-coded closet — 100-plus pair of shoes! — recalls Gucci's signature pattern. His brick-paved courtyard includes a fire-topped cascading waterfall.

