

TRIBEZA

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Chelle Neff

“WHO BUYS A HOUSE for one party?” Chelle Neff muses, surveying her light filled living room in the University Hills neighborhood in East Austin.

Perhaps a couple whose home decor includes a subtle scattering of skulls around every corner.

“One reason we loved this house is because we’re really into Halloween and every year we have a party and when we saw this, we said, “This is perfect for the party,” Neff remembers.

Neff, the owner of Urban Betty Salon, and her husband, David, a business consultant, moved into their open concept ranch style home two years ago while planning a wedding and weathering two dog surgeries.

The walls on the main floor of the Neff house are fleeced with posters from both David and Chelle’s collections prior to getting married, which happened right around the same time they moved into the house.

“We’re both real big into music so we pay homage to that with these rock posters. David already had some, and I had mine so it really all came together nicely,” Neff says.

And then there are the skulls. You don’t notice how many there are at first, but they haunt the house in subtle ways: Southwestern-style skull art in the den, an anatomical skeleton

poster above the mantle, glass bottles flanking the refrigerator, four framed prints masquerading as a headboard in the master bedroom.

Neff’s interior style at home combines estate and garage sale gems, thrift and antique store finds, treasures from high-end furniture stores, design centers and found items. (One dining room chair was even rescued from the curb and rehabbed through the magic of YouTube videos.)

One personal touch the couple added was a wood pallet wall in the dining room, adding a rustic feel to the otherwise vintage rock vibe of the space. A tin, turquoise “weird” sign that Chelle had custom made for David lights up the hearth where a fire would usually be. “We didn’t know if we should hang it on the wall or what, but one day the lady who cleans my house just put it there to get it out of the way and it just hit us that it should be in there.



Chelle Neff, owner of the oft-lauded Urban Betty Salon at her home.

It fits perfectly,” laughs Neff.

Her personal interior style overflows to the professional at Urban Betty, which recently added eight more chairs (which, Neff says, almost felt like opening a second location) during a recent renovation.

“At Urban Betty I mix new things with old



things so half of our mirrors were bought at estate sales or garage sales, I found some stuff at Austin City-Wide Garage Sale,” she explains. “The couch at Urban Betty is from Salvation Army; my little chair [at home] is from Goodwill — it was only \$25! I was going there for Halloween decorations and I saw it and said, “That chair is amazing, I have to have it.”

This mix-and-match philosophy was part of the reason Chelle and David’s created the Austin Weird Homes Tour. A conversation after the Modern Homes Tour a few years ago inspired the Neffs to seek out a “weird” homes tour to add to their repertoire. When they couldn’t find one, they were perplexed.

“That’s the epitome of Austin, why wouldn’t they have that? I said, “Well, that’s a bummer,” and about a week later, David said, “We should do it,” Neff recalls. “So the seed was planted and about a year later, we had the first Austin Weird Homes Tour.”

Ten percent of the proceeds from the Weird Homes Tour go to charity each year, another passion the Neffs share. In fact, an antique chest from the post office Chelle’s grandparents owned in Throckmorton, Texas showcases trophies and plaques both Neffs have received in recognition of the charitable work they do within the Austin community. It’s an important part of the couple’s ethos, and something that influences many aspects of their work. “The last two years [proceeds from the Tour went to] Caritas, which provides housing for refugees,” explains Neff. “We want something that ties in to the home tour, so there’s a couple more in town we’re looking at, too.” **7**

