

## Architectural Analysis of 534, Roble Fino

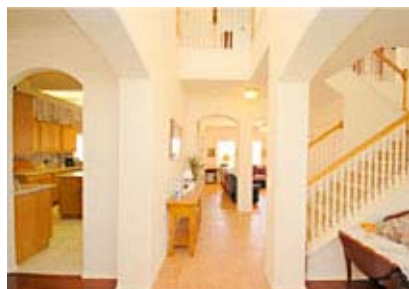
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Gordon Hartman, a local homebuilder, developed this Sonterra neighborhood north of Huebner in the late 1990s. Hartman founded Gordon Hartman Homes in 1983, and built homes for more than 2,500 families in San Antonio. His success in business is due to the popular floor plans, which at 534 Roble Fino demonstrates a fluid sequence of spaces that open up three-dimensionally between the two levels of the house. This house is a ‘find’ if you are looking for a contemporary home, because Hartman no longer builds homes; he sold his company in 2005 to McMillin Homes. Hartman is now a special needs philanthropist and started a local non-profit organization.



This stately red brick home is designed to synthesize the clean, unornamented look of modernity with a few nostalgic references to “home-sweet-home”. I would characterize it as an updated-Victorian. The portico in the center of the front façade pronounces *entry* with an extremely tall arch headed by a pointed gable. The doorway’s oval-shaped cut glass panel is reminiscent of late 19<sup>th</sup> century glass and mirrors seen in Victorian homes. Upon entering the house, you are presented with an amazing two-storey hallway that leads all the way to the back room of the house. Along this entryway, the walls into the kitchen, living room, side parlors and floors above have been cut away with arches to reveal glimpses into their spaces. The placement of the staircase descending down into this fluid, light-filled space gives the entry vestibule an almost Escher-esque like quality.



Modern construction technology allows an architect or builder to conceive space in a more fluid manner, however the comfortable floor plan is deeply rooted in history. The plan follows the arrangement of space seen in the American Four-Square, a Victorian design popular from the mid-1890s to the late 1930s.

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Hallmarks of the style include a basically square, boxy two-storey design, usually with four large, boxy rooms to a floor, a center dormer, and a large front porch. In Victorians I have seen in San Antonio, a tall central hallway often cuts right through to the rear of the house. Does this description sound a little familiar?



The house also has other charming, but modernized features of a more antique home, such as the arched entries between common rooms, the wainscot that organizes the design of the kitchen walls, and the tin plate ornament behind the stove---



a reference to the tin plate ceilings in 19<sup>th</sup> century Texas buildings. The wood paneling over the brick fireplace is done in the 18<sup>th</sup> century French manner of *boiserie*: raised panels and painted moldings to adorn cabinetry and walls. *Boiserie* became popular in San Antonio Victorian homes around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Also, have a look at the creative dormer cut-out in the ceiling of the first floor bedroom; there actually isn't a dormer on the exterior of the house. The fold in the ceiling is intended to focus the eye toward the Palladian window on the back wall. The pedestal sink in the half-bath completes the updated-Victorian look of this home.

