

# NATURE'S BOUNTY

INTERIOR DESIGNER ASHLEY GILBREATH GIVES AN ALABAMA HOME A FRESH LAYER OF FINISHES AND FURNISHINGS, SETTING THE STAGE FOR A FESTIVE MOOD DURING THE HOLIDAY SEASON.

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Karol and Darren Woodling enjoy entertaining throughout the year, but they really step things up when December rolls around. Their recently renovated home in Montgomery, Alabama, creates the perfect warm and welcoming environment for these gatherings, thanks to the talents of local designer Ashley Gilbreath. “The original structure had good bones with fine woods, slate floors, and a pleasant layout, but the interiors were dark and heavy,” says Gilbreath. “We chose to combine lots of paint with updated finishes and new furnishings.”

From the beginning, the Woodlings had decided to start anew with this home and not bring any of their own furniture. “They basically gave me free rein, and I must admit that was a lot of fun,” says Gilbreath. “At my first presentation meeting with them, they loved everything.”

The designer infused the home with her trademark Southern style that combines practicality and attention to detail. “My approach is to create spaces that naturally foster gatherings of family and friends,” she says. Appropriately, a true family living room with tall windows and French doors opening onto a back terrace takes center stage. “The main public spaces are relatively large,” says Gilbreath, “so I started with an

Previous pages, left to right: A lush garland crafted of native greenery enlivens the foyer stairway. Swirls of wide ribbons, large ornaments, and oodles of white lights animate the Christmas tree in the family-friendly living room. These pages, opposite: “Darren and I both come from large families, and we love entertaining on holidays with all our extended families, so we wanted a dining room with plenty of seating for everyone,” says Karol. Tailored dressmaker details and a wide runner embellish the gracious skirted table. Top left: A gabled portico frames the home’s inviting front door, festooned for the holidays. Above: In the foyer, a custom-designed, upholstered bench paired with a trio of small occasional tables offers extra seating during parties. Right: Sheer fabric panels frame the grand curving stairway and accentuate the foyer’s tall ceiling.





Above: The open kitchen is designed for both family time and entertaining. Herb topiaries and potted paperwhites add fragrant touches without being too fussy. Tall windows frame the new range hood adorned with a festive wreath. "With a little floral wire, it's easy to add fresh cuttings and fruit and berries from the yard for color throughout the holiday season," says Gilbreath. Right: The sunny breakfast room enjoys easy access to the kitchen, while French doors open onto the rear terrace. Opposite: Filled with natural light throughout the year, the living room reflects Gilbreath's signature style of sophistication fused with practicality and attention to detail. Generous windows and tall ceilings offer the perfect backdrop for a large Christmas tree in a corner.



"FOR OUR BIG REVEAL, WE WENT OUT OF TOWN FOR THE WEEKEND AND CAME BACK TO A GORGEOUS, DECORATED HOME. ASHLEY HAD EVERYTHING PERFECTLY IN PLACE."

—KAROL WOODLING

overall neutral palette and comfortable, substantial furnishings with tailored lines. Then I introduced a few well-chosen antiques, accessories, and vintage finds."

The dining room offers formality with a fresh twist. Gilbreath anchored the center of the space with a large skirted table and incorporated a tall paneled cabinet flanked with contemporary floor lamps and armchairs along one wall. The room opens to the outdoors through French doors, allowing for even more entertaining options.

The spirit of the house converges in an open, inviting kitchen. New countertops, cabinets, and a large range hood create an

elevated environment without major structural changes. In the breakfast space, Gilbreath mixed items from different times and places but of equal quality and standing so no single piece would overwhelm another. "An antique European farm table is a fool-proof breakfast table," she says. "It was always meant to be used, so day-to-day wear only adds to its patina and character." A combination of slipcovered host chairs, delicate side chairs, and an upholstered bench provides flexible seating.

"One of the reasons we were drawn to the house was that there is plenty of room to spread out," says Karol. Making the most of the original configuration, Gilbreath transformed a room off the



foyer into an “adult retreat.” Darker walls and a cowhide layered on a seagrass rug give the space its own character. A large abstract landscape is hung deliberately low along one wall. “I play with scale and proportion to push the safety line and introduce the unexpected,” the designer says.

When decorating for the holidays, Gilbreath takes a philosophical approach similar to her design style by focusing on traditional themes and lots of greenery. “I love to use anything local, and the fuller the better,” she says. “Here, I mixed in magnolia, cedar, and pine. Then I added red nandina berries for color.”

At the entry to the house, a tall tree sits alongside the arched porch, while baskets of rosemary plants and lanterns march up the

steps. A lush garland wrapped with wide gold ribbons stands out against the red brick. “The family actually uses the front door,” says Gilbreath, “so I wanted décor that works for both every day and holiday parties.” Inside, the designer adorned the curving stairway with a swooping garland of magnolia and eucalyptus festooned with silver stockings and silk ribbons. A rustic concrete urn planted with paperwhites sits atop the foyer’s round table.

With a welcoming sequence and sense of discovery, the Woodlings’ home unfolds with equal measure of updated elegance and traditional Southern comfort. And especially during the holiday season, it exudes an open invitation full of festive style.

Above: In the “adult retreat,” a richer neutral palette of textures and patterns creates depth and character. A cluster of citrus adds color and fragrance to a large wreath adorning the window. Opposite: With a sloping ceiling and rustic exposed wooden beams, the master suite is a gracious retreat outfitted in elegant linens, plush cottons, and a touch of silk. An antique rug in soft pinks layered atop seagrass adds warmth to the cool color scheme. A large bay offers a sunny spot for a desk. At the foot of the bed, a pair of upholstered armchairs and a tufted round ottoman create a comfortable seating area.



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