



SOUTHERN COMFORTS

AN ALABAMA COUPLE GRANTS ASHLEY GILBREATH FULL REIN TO TRANSFORM THEIR PASSÉ ABODE INTO A WELL-APPOINTED GATHERING PLACE.

BY Ashley Shaw | PHOTOGRAPHY BY Laurey Glenn





When Karol and Darren Woodling took a chance on a neglected property in foreclosure, Montgomery designer Ashley Gilbreath helped the couple transform the dark, dated house into a home with proverbial open arms. The bones of the brick Tudor were strong, but Ashley directed a complete interior renovation to give the Woodlings a refreshed and inviting place to entertain year-round.

As soon as visitors cross the front threshold of the Montgomery abode, they are greeted by a stunning foyer awash in white. The budget-conscious homeowners didn't care for the staircase's wrought-iron balusters, so Ashley selected décor to distract from the metalwork, including a floor-to-ceiling sheer that partially hides the top of the staircase. "We needed something that, when you walked in that room, really commanded a presence and brought the whole scale of the room into context," says Ashley. "It also took away from the busyness of the rail."

In addition, the ethereal curtain "sets a stage for pieces to look intentionally placed there," the designer says. Sizable accent chairs embellished with ornate wood detailing, set around a hefty table, not only stand up to the room's soaring ceilings, but they also help draw the eye away from the banister.

Comfortable and chic seating abounds in every room, and Ashley was careful to balance functionality with elegance. She explains how the beauty of older pieces—and new furnishings that are made to look vintage—is that they age gracefully under wear and tear. "It just adds more character to the pieces," says Ashley. "Like a leather chair your dad would sit in, it looks better the more it's loved on."

At the time of the redo, the Woodlings' two sons were soon-to-be teenagers, so Ashley covered the furniture with durable treated upholstery and selected hardy area rugs made of seagrass and animal hide. Her choices are practical for resisting stains and disguising heavy foot traffic, both inevitable with regular entertaining, but she also acknowledges the Southern aesthetic Karol and Darren desired.

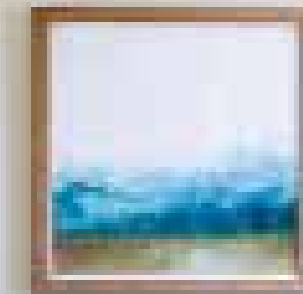


“Karol had a little bit more of a modern sense, but the home itself was a pretty traditional style,” says Ashley. “We had to complement what was there, but also make it theirs as well.” For instance, the unusually long dining room opens to the hallway on one side and the back patio on the other, making it appear even larger. To balance the size of the space, Ashley incorporated extra seating at both ends by way of velvety blue swivel chairs, perfect for friends and family mingling before mealtime. Towering floor lamps and large furnishings also anchor either side of the room, including a spacious china cupboard where Karol stows all she needs to set a gracious table.

Ultimately, Ashley feels honored to give clients like the Woodlings a beautiful backdrop for their cherished memories. “What I love about what we do is that we get to create the stage that families remember forever,” Ashley says. “It’s not that they remember exactly what happened or exactly what was said, but we get to create the feeling that this is a happy place.”



Designer Ashley Gilbreath layered updated accents with classic styles to impart Southern sensibility. Since homeowner Karol Woodling appreciates animal prints, Ashley incorporated a few variations, such as a faux zebra hide rug and tiger-stripe upholstery, that don't overwhelm other patterns.



"[The Woodlings] envisioned this as a big entertaining space," says Ashley, who brought blue skirted chairs into the vast dining room to expand seating for parties. Lined with goldenrod-yellow linen, the doors of a huge hutch bring to mind a decorative folding screen. Draperies festooned with scrollwork and cheery flowers, a fresh take on traditional damask, echo the mustard tones.





In the master bedroom, Ashley kept the palette subdued to set a tranquil tone. Serene landscape art in gilded frames lends contrast to the ecru-and-white scene. (Opposite) Original slate floors add distinctive character to the mostly white surrounds of the eating kitchen. Purchased on one of the designer's trips to Europe, the farmhouse-style breakfast table opens up to accommodate a crowd of hungry visitors. The charming Old-World accent keeps company with modern elements, like a sleek subway tile backsplash and modish pendant lights.