



Home, Grown

Designer Ashley Gilbreath knew she could turn a humble 1940s single-story into a gorgeous and functional house for her young family. Step one: Raise the roof!

by PETRA GUGLIELMETTI
photographs by HECTOR MANUEL SANCHEZ





A new second story gave the once low-slung house a major face-lift.

NEUTRAL BEAUTY

They painted the stairs gray (Sherwin-Williams Anonymous SW7046) to contrast with the floors.



One could say

that Ashley Gilbreath birthed two babies in 2016: her third child, Liza, and a major redo of the family's home. "Renovating is like childbirth in the sense that as soon as it begins, you ask why you ever thought it was a good idea," says the Montgomery, Alabama-based interior designer, laughing. And she knows what she's talking about, having bought, renovated, and sold more than a dozen homes with her husband, Barrett—not just flipping them but actually living in them. However, the couple knew they had found a keeper when they bought this 1940s brick home in 2014. It sat at the edge of a golf course that, when golfer free, functions more like a really well-groomed park, complete with a pond and stunning sunset views. When the course is closed on Mondays, pickup kickball and baseball games happen on the green.

As for the house itself, it had plenty of old-house charm, but its quirky

Cushy Setup

The living room already had gorgeous bones and light flooding in from three sides. The new bay window just builds out the drama, especially with a CR Laine custom charcoal sofa tucked in and flanked by coordinating curtains. It's proven to be the perfect spot for conversation and for placing the Christmas tree each year. "The room is very traditional architecturally, so the acrylic plastic table brings in a little something unexpected and fun. Plus, it offsets the visual weight of the sofa and chairs," Gilbreath notes. An antique trunk underneath keeps the piece from feeling too modern.



Defining Layers

The family dines here often, so it couldn't feel too formal. A trestle table was the key to keeping things a bit casual, while a French chandelier communicates that this is a dining room. Kerry Joyce sheer drapes on rods that were custom-made by a local blacksmith and hang throughout the house provide visual flow and softly cocoon the dining room from the adjacent hallway and foyer. "They say, 'This is its own space,' without having to put a wall there," Gilbreath says.



single-floor layout didn't work for a growing family. After consulting with friend and neighbor Chris Tippett, who recently cofounded Tippett Sease Baker Architecture, the Gilbreaths decided to double down and make the existing structure work—while doubling their square footage in the process. They lifted off the roof to add second-floor space for the kids and bumped out a cross-shaped addition downstairs in the back to house an expanded kitchen and a main bedroom suite complete with a sleeping porch. These renovations took the home from having 2,400 square feet, three bedrooms, and two baths to about 5,000 square feet, five bedrooms, and five and a half baths—more than enough to accommodate not only the Gilbreaths but also their extended family. (It now sleeps up to 17 people.) “It was important that when everybody needs a room on Thanksgiving or Christmas there would be enough space for that,” Gilbreath says.

LET'S GET PRACTICAL

Working with clients at various life stages has helped Gilbreath hone a detailed and down-to-earth approach to designing spaces for families, including her own. “I am always impressed when a client says something like, ‘Make sure that closet is big enough to hold a Pack 'n Play for when I have grandbabies one day and they visit,’” she says. While decorating this house, she asked long-view questions of her own, like, “Will this setup still work when the kids are in high school?” In the meantime, every decision has taken into account the tendencies of kids ages 9, 7, and 3—plus one rule-breaking puppy. “The reality is that right now, there are more children and dogs in our life than there are big people who do fancy things,” Gilbreath says. “I've tried to be



PROP STYLING: BUFFY HARGETT MILLER



Backyard Refresh

The once low-slung structure got a dramatic update thanks to rolled-roof shed dormers, quaint diagonal-board plank shutters, and a thoughtful downstairs addition. Where possible, original windows were retained, and all new ones were modeled to match. Classic colors—warm white-painted brick (Farrow & Ball Clunch No. 2009) with gray-beige accents (Farrow & Ball Stony Ground No. 211) and a weathered hand-split cedar-shake roof—complete a new-old home that feels equal parts friendly and gracious.



Rise and Shine

The breakfast nook lets light from both sides into the kitchen, which previously felt dark. The banquette features a durable Brentano raffia, and the vintage chairs have their original fabric from the thirties or forties. “I’m not in love with the pattern—it’s fine, but I love the fact that you can’t hurt it,” Gilbreath says. “They’re already lived-in and have so much character. There are places where the strings are popping loose or the sun has faded the fabric a touch.”

cautious with materials and thoughtful in the placement of things so the house looks put together but is also practical. If we spill chocolate milk or the dog runs in with muddy paws, it’s okay. I want to feel comfortable in my home.”

The family moved in just a month before Gilbreath gave birth to her youngest, Liza, as construction was still wrapping up. “On the day she was born, the plumber came to connect the kitchen sink,” she recalls. “The deal was, if I came home from the hospital and didn’t have a sink to wash a bottle in, I might hurt someone.” Of course, as with childbirth, such angst feels more than worth it in hindsight. “It almost definitely would have been easier on us and on our pocketbook to knock this house down and rebuild, but I just love to breathe new life into a home,” says Gilbreath, who, for the record, is not moving anytime soon. “I have told my sweet husband that he is welcome to move if he ever would like to, but I am staying put.”

HIGH LIGHTS
Visual Comfort
pendants hang
over the island.



Collected Kitchen

“Because I design homes every day, I did not want the typical marble,” says Gilbreath, who loves how her soapstone slab countertops and backsplash grow even more interesting with age. Additional intrigue is provided over the range by a magnetic knife strip that was custom-made using a wood fragment the couple scooped up on a trip to Europe. The slipcovered seats pulled up to the white oak island are decade-old former barstools; their legs have been shortened, and their fabric was patched.





Bar Scene

Built around doors Gilbreath found in Europe, the bar houses an ice machine, beverage cooler, drink assortment, and a Craig Greene painting illuminated by an Ikea pendant. Whether it's Liza dispensing ice onto the floor for family dog, Bo, to eat or her parents concocting mimosas, this is a go-to enclave. "God created wine right after he created the mom," Gilbreath says, laughing. The wood butcher block is another European find—one that was originally destined for a client's house until Gilbreath realized how perfect it looked here.



Hearth and Soul

Above the original fireplace, an oil landscape painting is artfully propped to hide the TV, though the fireplace is just as likely to lure family members into this room. "If we have a Saturday morning when nobody has a game or event, that cocktail table gets scooted out of the way and we eat a picnic breakfast in front of the fire," Gilbreath says. A Fibreworks rug, a slipcovered Verellen sofa, and antique leather chairs complete the setup, while dueling Visual Comfort floor lamps and a gray mantel distract from the fact that the fireplace is off-center in the room. **SL**



OPEN INVITATION

With plenty of seating, the porch is a cozy extension of the interior.