

LIVING Spaces

Combining Home & Heart with Design

By ANNA KLEMENT

Photography courtesy of ASHLEY GILBREATH

Born and raised in Baton Rouge, Ashley Gilbreath has been greatly influenced by her origins and surroundings. As a young girl, Gilbreath would draw house plans at her grandmother's house in Louisiana. In fact, her attraction to the design world was thanks to her grandmother's emphasis on family and the importance of home. *Home* set the stage for memories to look back on, stories to tell, and messes to make. After high school, she attended Auburn University for their reputable architecture program.

"I began as an architecture student and graduated with an interior design degree," says Gilbreath. "It was my junior year when I realized I was more interested in the inside of the spaces we were planning. I was always wondering when we would get to designing the inside of the buildings."

With her senior year approaching, she migrated to New York City to continue her education at the New York School of Interior Design while simultaneously working under Richard Keith Langham. Langham—whose work has graced the pages of *Elle Decor* and *Architectural Digest*, not to mention the home of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis—is an Alabama-born designer, so it's no surprise that Gilbreath's brand became synonymous with Southern, traditional style under his mentorship. She says, "I never want to create a room that feels like it can't be lived in. My signature style is to keep a room casual yet elegant—distinct, yet comfortable. My approach is to create beautiful designs that can also fit a family's lifestyle."



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And you can take the girl out of the South, but you can't take the South out of the girl. Gilbreath married her college sweetheart, an Alabama boy, and she laughingly says, "Montgomery boys never seem to leave Montgomery." Their long-distance relationship began while she was interning in New York, and Langham allowed her to return often to Alabama. Eventually, Gilbreath returned full-time to start their future together. Before starting her interior design studio, she worked in hospitality design and at an architectural firm in Montgomery. It was evident the city would be a base for her family to make memories and form lasting friendships, and it still serves as the headquarters for her business. She quickly became highly reputable in the industry, and she has been featured in numerous home and lifestyle publications as well as on HGTV renovation shows.

Her success in both commercial and residential projects led to the opening of her lifestyle store Parish Shoppe in Montgomery, which is dedicated to her origins in Louisiana.

"I have a complete dedication to my work. I don't do anything halfway," she says. "The shop is an extension

of my own home, and I hope that clients will feel it is an extension of theirs as well. *Parish* is a territorial term for counties in Louisiana, my home state. Homes are for being. It's where we can gather together and truly *live* in the space." Gilbreath explains, "I want things to be casually elegant, which means it's child-, pet-, and wine stain-proofed. The rooms should capture the character of the owner without feeling like everything is fragile. History is important for telling the story; I'll mix family heirlooms with a modern piece of art to keep a sense of place." She is also inspired by places she has traveled. "Paris, Spanish flea markets, botanical gardens, and the magical world of antique shops. My style is a mixture of unique finds, such as classical sculptures, with modern pieces that have a coastal or European flair. I think it's important to invest in larger staple pieces that are universal and can be matched with fun accessories like colorful pillows."

The flagship store is unique to Montgomery because of its highly curated pieces thoughtfully sourced from all over the world. When Gilbreath decided to expand her business, Rosemary Beach, Florida, was a no-brainer for the shop's second location. As some of the community's original residents, Gilbreath's



family has owned several cottages in the area, and the place is dear to her heart. Her first adventure into the world of retail on Scenic Highway 30-A was a summer pop-up shop behind the Hidden Lantern Bookstore in Rosemary Beach several years ago. That summer was an experiment in seeing whether she could bring Parish Shoppe to the area permanently—and it was a success.

In the spring of 2020, Parish Shoppe in Rosemary Beach opened in the heart of Main Street. This central location, Gilbreath hopes, will bring a lot of foot traffic when the town recovers from the closures brought on by the coronavirus pandemic. "We recognize that most of our customers will be searching for goods to fit in their beach homes, and we've refined our inventory from our flagship store and adapted it to a coastal feel without being overdone," she says.

The beach lifestyle shop is a special collaboration with Gilbreath's business partner, Elizabeth Adams of Ex Voto Vintage. Customers can find furniture, timeless keepsakes, stylish clothing, accessories, and curated gifts. The limited-edition collection from Ex Voto (which means "votive offering") includes one-of-a-kind designs by Adams that breathe new life into vintage jewelry. Many of her pieces include gold, leather, pearls, crystals, and semiprecious stones. As for Gilbreath, she hopes she'll have something for everyone to enjoy at Parish. It serves as a love letter to her interior design work in the Gulf Coast area, matching the cool, laid-back attitude that 30-A possesses. She's fond of muted blue and

green tones, driftwood, and incorporating natural elements in a vignette. She intends to select thoughtful, personal pieces that leave room for spontaneity. She says, “We’ll have unique treasures of all shapes and sizes that have longevity and can fit a wide range of budgets.”

Gilbreath currently splits her time pretty evenly between Montgomery and 30-A, leaving time to travel for her clients in Atlanta and Nashville, in various cities in Texas, and along the East Coast. She credits her abundant success to grit, a lifetime of determination, and faith, and she hopes that her collaboration with Ex Voto will offer small-batch goods that are versatile and durable and have longevity in the home. ▣

The Parish Shoppe satellite outpost in Rosemary is open weekdays, while the Montgomery location is open by appointment only Monday through Thursday and from 10:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. on Fridays. Visit AshleyGilbreath.com to learn more.



Anna Klement is a freelance magazine writer and editor. She is a Santa Rosa Beach local and has a degree in journalism and creative media from the University of Alabama. She writes profile essays inspired by people, places, and good food for both print and digital media. She strives to write meaningful stories that are enlightening and offer a different perspective.

