

Designer Ashley Gilbreath brings layers of design to a busy Mobile family in her new book of projects from across the Southeast

THE JOY OF HOME

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shley Gilbreath has developed a niche designing beautiful, functional homes for families across the Southeast. With three kids of her own, the Montgomery-based interior designer knows a thing or two about what makes a space work for the chaos of daily living with kids. This April, however, Gilbreath is "giving birth" to another baby— a coffee table book— adding another feather to her cap.

"The book was a massive labor of love, like childbirth!" she laughs. Gilbreath says the opportunity to be published fell into her lap, and the project happened quickly— like a whirlwind. "The common thread in the book is that each project is inherently different because it looks like the client. You might see a little of me, but I want my client's voices to be heard." She returns to the idea of childrearing, explaining that she works with her client a bit like you dress a toddler in the morning. She finds three great options that fit the client, and lets them choose which one to use. "I let the client guide the process."

Included in her forthcoming book is a stunning five bedroom, four and a half bath home in Spring Hill that she designed for—you guessed it— a family of five. The home already had beautiful millwork, beams and pecky cypress paneling, so paint, wall coverings and decor were the focus. However, the new owners

came to the property virtually empty-handed. "When furnishing a home all at once, it's important to put a sense of layering and depth to the rooms," she cautions. Gilbreath helped them gather antiques and pieces that look as though they were collected over a lifetime, all the while keeping in mind that the home would need to last through the rigors of childhood and evolve as the children grew. The result is a spectacular work, certainly worthy of being chosen as one of the nine residences featured in the pages of her book.

At the end of the day, Gilbreath has created a space where a family can gather to celebrate everyday living. It's something she never loses sight of at work or at home. She says in her own house, faith keeps her going and family keeps her smiling.

"The large kitchen had a great floor plan and impressive architectural finishes. To impart some softness, we introduced striped slipcovers on the chairbacks and added upholstered counter stools in the same treated fabric."

"Since the family gathers to watch TV in this room, but also entertains here, it needed to be comfortable with a brushstroke of elegance. We included a slipcovered sofa, armchairs with pretty, sinewy lines and a durable leather ottoman to be moved around as needed."

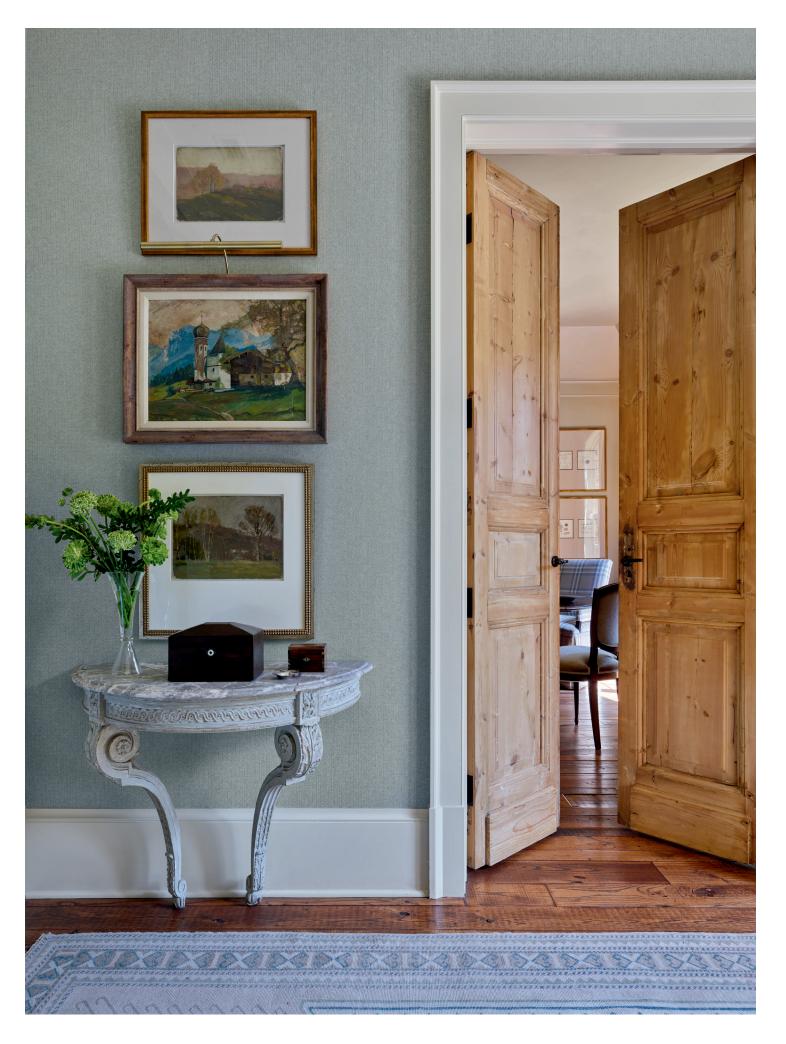


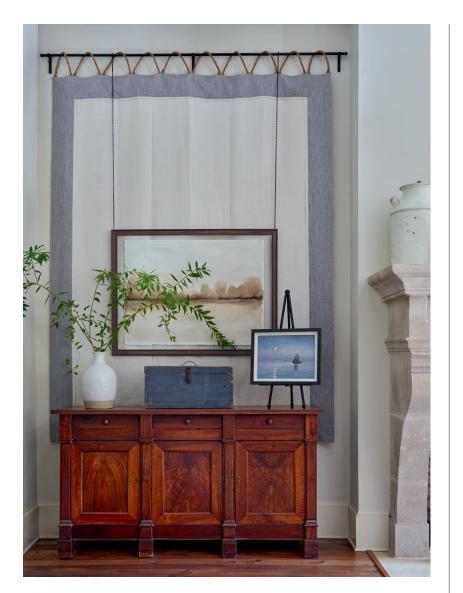


"Undoubtedly, the specific usage of individual spaces will evolve over time, but I hope their purpose—creating lasting memories—remains the same."



"The study already had beautiful pecky cypress walls and built-ins, so we wanted to add some darker pieces for more definition. An old Spanish- style trestle table serves as the desk, joined by a skirted, olive-green leather desk chair and a large custom-foxed mirror."

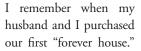




"Over the antique chests flanking the fireplace, we suspended a fabric wall hanging to aid in reducing the scale of the mantel and the ceiling height."

"Stacking different types of artworks instead of using just one large piece or a tall mirror can draw the eye up and give a feeling of height. These are all landscapes, so they speak to each other in a meaningful way while having a distinct accent."

Excerpt from "The Joy of Home" by Ashley Gilbreath, courtesy of Gibbs Smith Publishers:



Yes, I totally understand most normal people have one forever house—that's the point. But I now realize I haven't yet lived in mine, and maybe it will be a while before I do. However, when we bought the first one, everything had to be perfect. It wasn't, but I felt like it should be. Though we didn't have children yet, I imagined them being there. I thought through nurseries and toddler rooms, preteen and high school rooms. I considered the need for a small outbuilding suitable for a little girl's playhouse and even thought about wedding receptions in our backyard! It's amazing how far our minds can go when we start thinking about the distant future. Designing forever houses for our clients is a thrill that lets me relive those feelings I had so many years ago.

When I think about the traditional definition of the forever house, and perhaps my inability to stay in one, I am reminded how temporary a house can be in contrast to our recollections of things we experienced and how we felt there. I may, in fact, never have the traditional forever house, but I look forward to my eternal house full of family and wonderful memories.



Ashley Gilbreath, Interior Designer and author of "The Joy of Home," at home with her three children.