



Architecture: Kirby Mears, Murphy Mears Architects Interior Design: Marie Flanigan, Marie Flanigan Interiors  
Home Builder: Marcel Barone, The Southampton Group Landscape Architecture: Herbert Pickworth, Herbert Pickworth Garden Designer



# À La Carte

Rich layers inform a design team's recipe for the new home of Houston restaurateurs.

WRITTEN BY MARGARET ZAINEY ROUX  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JULIE SOEFER  
STYLING BY JESSICA HOLTAM

Natural materials are to a home what fresh ingredients are to a meal: the essential elements for flavor and depth. So when a restaurateur couple embarked on the design of their new Houston abode, they enlisted architect

Kirby Mears and interior designer Marie Flanigan to help concoct a recipe for the project that would mix rich interiors with raw, wholesome layers. “The homeowners know what it means to be both a guest and a host, and they wanted to create a warm environment and ‘an experience’ that their visitors would be able to enjoy,” says Mears.

The structure’s thoughtful siting behind an ivy-clad privacy wall and a screen of live oaks suggests it may have sprouted organically from the landscape. Builder Marcel Barone used a color-matched mortar on the tumbled brick exterior, its matte surfaces leading to interiors filled with sundrenched rooms wrapped in a warm, neutral palette of flax and stone peppered with rust, ochre, shale and ash. These earthen hues complement the hardy materials that define the interior’s decidedly strong yet subtle architectural features. In any other setting, the Texas limestone flooring, plaster walls, cement countertops, and white oak cabinets, beams and doors might read more rustic, but here they lean refined given the complexity of the design and proximity to contemporary appointments. However, the plans weren’t drawn with any particular style in mind. “While we love ‘style,’” explains Mears, who worked with project architect Julie Wright, “starting with a pre-determined ‘style’ can be limiting and take attention away from solutions that would otherwise evolve naturally from the owners’ program.”

As it turned out, what the homeowners wanted had more to do with lifestyle than style. “We are the typical doting grandparents,” chimes the wife. “And we love to travel and enjoy as many restaurants as possible both here in town and while on trips. We also love to entertain in our new home.” The couple relishes having a revolving door of children, grandchildren and friends, so a major request was for spaces to be comfortable enough for a crowd and yet intimate enough for two. “We sought inspiration in many different places,” says Flanigan, joined by associate designers Ashlee Garner and Kristin Amundsen.

“Sometimes, we found it simply by walking the property and absorbing its lush beauty. Other times, it came from the pictures and mementos our clients have collected during their travels. They have been exposed to many cultures and developed a deep appreciation for each that enriches their global perspective.”

Under one roof, old-world European elegance and modern American luxury merge to create an atmosphere as welcoming as a countryside inn and as chic as a boutique hotel. Spanish, Italian and Moroccan influences prevail in the entry and kitchen with wrought-iron fixtures and plank doors and cabinets outfitted in artisanal cast bronze hardware. But what truly speaks the language of the home is the authenticity of the reclaimed tilework. In the entry, a “rug” assembled from 19<sup>th</sup>-century terracotta tiles features a traditional floral medallion motif, while antique Zellige tiles from Chateau Domingue comprise the backsplash in the kitchen. Each individual tile is a little bit off from the next—a chip here, some fading there. And according to Flanigan, these perfect imperfections help transform them from simply materials into relics. Contributing to this continental mix are a pair of antique-inspired verdigris globe pendants from England, handwoven Turkish textiles and a myriad of provincial ceramic vessels.

However, the European nuances remain elusive and pared down to impart an environment more reminiscent of Vervoordt than Versailles. And to compensate for the lack of superfluous décor, Flanigan relied on scale in order to anchor the voluminous rooms, which feature expansive banks of steel-framed windows and French doors and ceilings towering up to 20 feet in some areas. Oversized carpets, lighting and original abstract art maximize visual impact while defying any hint of minimalism. Overstuffed, upholstered seating remains streamlined with straight backs, squared arms and tailored skirts for a current look, while linen, leather, velvet and other feel-good fabrics infuse a sense of coziness. “The layers of materials, colors and textures help make this home unique along with the multiple cultures that are represented,” explains Flanigan, who turned to her worldly clients when rounding out the project’s refined flavor profile. “Together, these elements illustrate a compelling story of beauty, diversity and a life well-lived.” ■



The formal living room’s vaulted ceilings are grounded by a Danby marble mantel from Materials Marketing below an Ebanista Lirio mirror. Custom ottomans in Rose Tarlow Melrose House linen face a coffee table designed with a slab of reclaimed Bourgogne limestone from Chateau Domingue. Interior designer Marie Flanigan layered a rug from Madison Lily Rugs over a jute one from Akara.

Walls by Segreto Finishes wrap the family room in this home by Murphy Mears Architects. Here, an extra-long Lee sofa pairs with a Gregorius Pineo lounge chair in linen from Arabel Fabrics. A built-in seat fabricated by builder Marcel Barone tucks into a niche next to the bookcase. The Bulles lamp is from Formations. A rug from Armadillo adds texture.





**Left:** Nestled into the family room, a breakfast banquette area features an Eglo Gaetano pendant custom finished in plaster by Segreto Finishes above Queen chairs by Roche Bobois and a custom table.

**Opposite:** Small lattice globe pendants by Jamb and a vintage Zellige tile backsplash from Chateau Domingue add character to the kitchen. Segreto Finishes custom mixed the island cabinetry's gray-green hue and plastered the vent hood above the Lacanche range. The commissioned painting is by Michael Dines.





**Above:** Butler's pantry cabinetry custom finished by Segreto Finishes using Sherwin-Williams' Mindful Gray mixes with hardware and a Kallista faucet from Elegant Additions and a counter of concrete stone and white sand with a marble finish. The custom flooring is from Alkusari Stone.

**Opposite:** A custom table pairs with chairs from the RH Mesa teak collection in the open-air pavilion. Wall-mount lighting by French Market Lanterns imparts a contemporary feel. Landscape designer Herbert Pickworth added the Boston Ivy in the background.



**Above:** Sherwin-Williams' Greek Villa coats walls in a guest bedroom furnished with a chandelier from Circa Lighting, Parsons slipcovered bed from RH, Bungalow Classic side table and Currey & Company lamp. A lumbar pillow in Pierre Frey's Beaufort pattern adds a pop of color.

**Opposite:** The main bathroom walls were plastered and painted a soft blue and adorned with a hand-painted floral mural by Segreto Finishes, forming a relaxing backdrop for the MTI Baths Elise freestanding tub with Kallista hardware from Elegant Additions. The Dolomite Corina flooring is from Ann Sacks.

