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THE BEAUTY of HOME

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REDEFINING TRADITIONAL INTERIORS





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The home is a mirror of the soul, reflecting the spirit of the people who dwell within. As such, it should combine the beliefs and memories they hold dear with the items they cherish most. Entering a home should be an immersive experience saturated by a particular perspective. It is refreshing when someone states his or her point of view honestly and precisely. That same sense of candor can translate to the home. The story of its inhabitants should be instantly apparent, but the surroundings should also suggest that there is more to be learned. When we walk into a well-articulated room, we should feel as though we have been invited into an ongoing conversation. A home with character inspires participation and delivers a lasting impression.

Every home begins as a blank canvas. A fundamental question for interior designers and architects is how to say something truly new and original with the basic building blocks that have existed since the beginning of time. Choices of materials and finishes are one of the most important ways to address this challenge. Authentic, natural materials automatically lend character through tactile experience. Wood may be smooth, rugged, or reclaimed. Stone may be tumbled, honed, or polished. Deliberate variations among materials can set up dynamic interplay, as in a fireplace surround I designed where the limestone shifted from rough, split-face channels to a smooth, honed surface. When light glanced across it, there was a dance of sheen and shadow that accentuated the character and depth of the same material expressed in different form. Some selections mumble, while others dominate the conversation. A discerning designer knows how to ensure that a home's character is reinforced, not overpowered, by these decisions.

One of my roles is to serve as a vessel, taking in my clients' conceptions of beauty and perceptions of a meaningful life in order to deliver surroundings that allow them to live that out. Listening carefully to the way people talk about their homes and the things they value most allows me to discover the roots of their preferences and priorities. I also gain insight by spending time with clients outside of the office. A scouting trip to local art galleries or a stroll through an antique store provides clues about what excites them and what doesn't. When people play an active role in the design of their home, it becomes their personal expression. I enjoy displaying beloved items or reinventing found objects from someone's past in order to forge the sense of individuality that is vital to curating a home with character.

One couple I worked with was deeply inspired by the grandeur and detail of a particular church ceiling. By using reclaimed materials to adapt the design for the ceiling of their living room, we were able to recall its magnificence. Surrounded by walls of antique stone from France, the room possessed qualities of weight, depth, and patina. This same couple had gathered a collection of antique Persian rugs woven in rich gem tones. My first instinct was to shy away from their bold dyes and patterns because I feared they might distract from the room's already strong forms and textures. Instead, I allowed my clients' passion to lead the way, using the vivid hues of the rugs to guide the palette of the room while offsetting them with neutral shades. Ultimately, the power of the stone and wood balanced the impact of the rugs, melding them into a design that was harmonious and uniquely relevant to the people who live there.



PREVIOUS: Walls of stone reclaimed from a French chateau, antique oak floors, and an intricately patterned Persian rug imbue the living room with depth and personality. LEFT: The grain of a reclaimed oak ceiling, tonalities of antique limestone, and cabinetry lined with textural grass-cloth celebrate the beauty of organic materials. Kevin Gillentine's impressionistic landscape brings tones of blue and green into the palette.

Sometimes clients are captivated by a certain time or place and want their home to recapture what they love most about it. For a couple with an affinity for Louisiana's early Acadian architecture, I designed rooms featuring exposed vintage brick accented by antiques from New Orleans. The ambiance and age of these ingredients called forth the atmosphere of the location and period that resonated deeply for them, allowing them to revisit a special memory every time they came home.

Instilling character in a home is a voyage of adventure that helps us learn what matters

most and awakens us to the nuances of design. When my clients walk into their finished homes, my hope is that they will immediately recognize themselves in it. The character of a house comes from the heart of the inhabitants. A fusion of personal psyches, experiences, and rituals, the home is a sacred place. It is the cocoon where we are revived and comforted and the haven into which we invite people to feel the same way. This is where we hold our treasure—both material and spiritual. It is where the divine whispers amidst the daily noise, revealing a highly individual vision of the well-lived life.





PREVIOUS: Honey-toned, hand-hewn wood beams warm the kitchen's light palette, as do brass-trimmed seeded-glass pendant lights. While the veins of the countertops echo the finish of rift-cut cabinetry and cast bronze hardware, the simplicity of the plaster hood provides a place for the eye to rest. OPPOSITE: In the dining room, ripples of soft blue linen upholstery mediate the precise form of the plaster table, and wood beams and limestone paving balance the geometry of the pendant light and windowpanes. ABOVE LEFT: In the outdoor kitchen, a sleek plaster hood floats against patterned encaustic tiles incorporated into a smeared-mortar stone wall. ABOVE RIGHT: Plaster arches form a series of vestibules along a grand hallway.

BELOW AND OPPOSITE: The master bath is rich in historical charm expressed by the original bead-board ceiling, painted plank walls, and traditional patterned tile floor. Contemporary elements including steel doors and black-lacquered mirrors balance the old-fashioned claw-foot tub and dual vanity made from a vintage dresser.



BELOW: A crimson onyx vanity floating on a wall of dark gray plaster becomes the element of surprise in this powder room, where a curvaceous, carved gilt-wood mirror adds another unexpected touch. OPPOSITE: In a bedroom, a hand-painted scene of flowering trees executed on pieced and lightly antiqued paper creates the impression of being in a walled garden.

