

HOME & DESIGN

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STYLE

ONE-OF-A-KIND HOMES
AWARD-WINNING REDOS
LUSH LANDSCAPES





Architect Christine Kelly redesigned the home's original side entrance to be front-facing, creating a welcoming foyer (above). Marks-Woods Construction Services fashioned a turned stair with a new landing. Designer Liz Mearns conveyed a collected look with a Chinese altar table, a Farsh Carpets stair runner and a vintage rug. Straight ahead, the airy living room features a bay (opposite) with an Arhaus table and Noir chairs.



LIVELY MIX

Liz Mearns embraces warmth and casual sophistication in an Alexandria abode

Text by Julie Sanders | Photography by Stacy Zarin Goldberg



With four active kids, a homemaker and her attorney husband wanted their outmoded 1951 Colonial to better suit their needs. They assembled a design team that included architect Christine Kelly, Marks-Woods Construction Services and designer Liz Mearns to mastermind a transformation. “The goal was to create more room for the family. We reconfigured and updated all interior spaces,” recounts Marks-Woods partner Drew Marks. Among the mandates: Reorient the front entry and foyer, move the primary suite and expand the galley kitchen. Doors were added—and removed—to facilitate flow and create coziness. The redo ultimately added 400 square feet to the 4,600-square-foot, five-bedroom abode.

Mearns joined the team at the start of the process. “Liz had designed our living room a couple of years earlier; we loved what she did, so we wanted her there to advise us,” explains the wife. The designer immediately gleaned her clients’ aesthetic, which she describes as “California cool”—a casual yet curated look that is both sophisticated and family-friendly.

“It feels effortless,” Mearns says. “But it’s clear there was a design plan.” A Q&A with the designer about the project follows.



The family room (above) boasts large-scale, kid-friendly seating. A 104-inch sofa in durable Lee fabric and a West Elm leather couch surround a 72-by-43-inch bluestone coffee table; an abstract painting by Tiffany Steele McAvoy is a unifying element. An eye-catching Arteriors chandelier hangs above an RH table and Arhaus chairs in the dining room (opposite), which features a vintage mirror and lamp atop a Noir sideboard.

How did the home's look evolve?

It was collective brainstorming to reach a style. My family is originally from California, and I went with something reminiscent of rancher style, which you see out there. The house has no basement and was built in the '50s, so the look felt right. I'm inspired by California designers like Amber Lewis, who creates eclectic spaces in a relaxed, casual style. This house couldn't be too precious, since a family lives here. I tell my clients, a house can be sophisticated and not be formal; don't confuse sophistication with formality. You can have both.

Renovation Architecture: Christine A. Kelly, AIA, Crafted Architecture LLC, Alexandria, Virginia. Interior Design: Liz Mearns, Imagine Design, Arlington, Virginia. Renovation Contractor: Drew Marks, Marks-Woods Construction Services, Alexandria, Virginia.

What design choices support the home's aesthetic?

Our taglines were neutrals, textures, West Coast lifestyle. We used a lot of casegoods; sideboards in the living and dining rooms are by Noir, which is based out of LA and has a cool, funky look. We also pulled in vintage pieces so the rooms feel collected and not like a catalog. It was a fine line between California and mid-century. Combining—styles and eras, old and new—gives a room depth.

You used unmatching fabrics for the family room sofas. How do you make that work?

I prefer upholstering sofas in different fabrics. I get pushback on it sometimes, but I like rooms to feel slightly collected. If you don't match, though, you have to be careful that the shapes of the frames work together.

Share how you selected the rugs for this project.

I treat rugs like art. I love to mix mediums—jute, antique Persian, hide, stripes. There are a lot of antique rugs in this project. In the foyer, an antique rug looks great next to a fresh, striped stair runner. And the living room has a very ropey jute rug that's soft underfoot. I wanted it to be neutral to support a custom ottoman in there that I had upholstered using a beautiful antique rug. It's a centerpiece of the room.

How does art enhance a space?

Art is so important—it really is the element that pulls everything together. I try to mix prints, landscapes, abstracts, etc. Your eye stops and appreciates art more when it's not all the same. In this project, there are more than five pieces by Tiffany Steele McAvoy, who works with





ASK LIZ

NAME A TREND YOU'VE EMBRACED.

For a while it was brass hardware and finishes everywhere, but lately we're seeing people wanting nickel again. I still love the brass, but nickel can also be pretty.

WHAT TREND WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE MORE OF?

During covid, we learned that more cozy separate rooms are good to have—this house has some intimate spots that serve a family well. I'd like to see more sitting rooms off of primary bedrooms, so people can shut a door and have privacy. If you're building, give yourself the option to be separate and private sometimes.

FAVORITE COLOR RIGHT NOW?

Benjamin Moore's White Dove is my go-to neutral. For a big color, I love Ka Ching by C2. It's a deep, moody green that I've been using lately.

WHAT PIECE OF FURNITURE WOULDN'T YOU PART WITH?

The club chair next to the fireplace in my kitchen. My husband cooks while I sit there with my laptop and a glass of wine.



me and is a talented painter of abstract art. There's one in the family room that I think ties the room together.

Describe the kitchen design.

I collaborated with the wife and Pennsylvania-based Master Design, which fabricated the white oak cabinetry. There was a lot of editing. We wanted the kitchen to be a calm space, so we kept the finishes consistent, without much variation in surfaces. I love the black cabinet wall.

We chose honed Taj Mahal quartzite for the countertops and backsplash and used a glazed, handmade ceramic tile from Portugal for the range wall. The hood was custom by Marks-Woods; they applied the plaster finish on site.

Why choose wallpaper over paint?

When a room lacks architecture, wallpaper can give it interest. I used a bold floral pattern by Thibaut in the wife's sitting room to create something happy and unexpected. I also find that wallpaper can define a transition space as a room; here, I wallpapered a second-floor pass-through that we expanded and turned into a game room.

What is the story behind the primary suite?

It used to be on the second floor above the garage, part of a 1980s addition. The owners decided to use that huge space as a rec room for the kids and moved their bedroom down to the main floor,



Marks-Woods recently won PRO Remodeler of the Year awards for both the kitchen and the whole house; an addition tripled the size of the kitchen (above), which is anchored by an oversized island. A skylight brightens the vaulted eating area (opposite). Part of the owners' suite, the wife's sitting room (below) is elevated by Thibaut botanical wall covering.



to a space that previously contained two bedrooms. The wife originally hoped to use the smaller one as a closet, but I persuaded her to make it her sitting room. I envisioned it as a little feminine, a respite from the chaos of family life. Beautiful built-ins line one wall and those fit the bulk of her wardrobe.

Talk about the variety of woods in this house.

The floors are a wide-plank maple and the doors are new to the home, made of fir stained a warm hue; I love that they're not white. The kitchen cabinets are light-stained white oak and we have dark walnut built-ins in the mudroom. While I think you want some consistency, I believe mixing woods ensures a house won't feel like a model home. Different woods make a space feel special. ■