

# Entertaining in Elegance

*An elevated Southern cottage plays the perfect host to classic and sophisticated gatherings.*

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An original Louis Philippe mirror is flanked by antique sconces, offering gorgeous character and patina in an otherwise sleek living space. Generously sized new windows and French doors lend a breath of fresh air. The draped focal wall is cleverly layered with framed intaglios for a subtle yet sophisticated statement. The overall look is timeless.

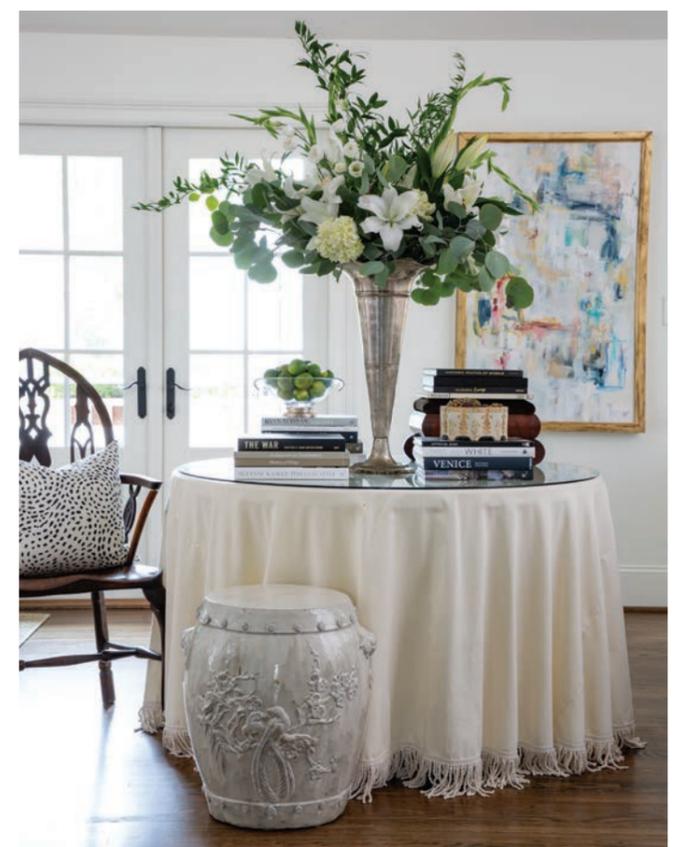


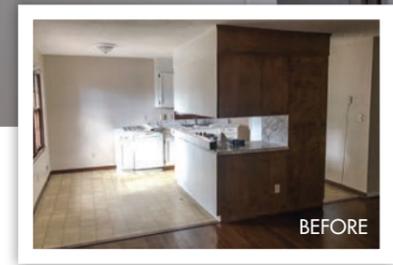
The foyer is complete with McKenzie Dove's signature black-and-white oil paintings as well as an abstract piece created by the homeowner herself. Right: The home's facade is complemented by handsome landscaping. Far right: The dining room befits the homeowner's penchant for hosting elegant gatherings.



An age-old, lush forest of towering trees intermingles with pristine sidewalks, manicured garden lawns, and historic homes in Alabama's Mountain Brook neighborhood. Dotting the sophisticated Birmingham enclave are three quaint yet bustling villages where families, joggers, and couples take to the eateries, shops, baker, and grocer by foot. So, when a 1950s home went on the market in idyllic Crestline Village, it unsurprisingly sold within 24 hours. The new homeowners were thrilled to have a parcel of land near their children and grandchildren and in such a walkable, family-friendly area. However, the outdated home would require extensive architectural and interior renovations—a pair of eyes that could reimagine the cottage through the elegant and inviting lens the homeowner envisioned. Enter Leigh Misso of River Brook Design & Construction.

The homeowner is the quintessential gracious Southern hostess with a penchant for entertaining guests, a lifetime of heirloom pieces to put to good use, and a soft spot for a fabulous screened-in porch. "So, we just started brainstorming and looked at, 'Okay, what can we do aesthetically to the interior and the exterior to give it that wow factor and accommodate a large screened-in porch,'" says Misso. From that starting point, she knew that a vaulted ceiling in the secluded back of the house would be the perfect airy retreat for her client. "So, working backward, we moved to the front of the home and redesigned the exterior to change the low-sloped





Misso took a dated, dark kitchen and turned it on its head. Whether hosting guests or enjoying an intimate evening alone, the homeowners delight in the connected culinary and alfresco spaces. “They kind of live right there in that kitchen and screened-in area,” says Misso. “I love that the porch is accessible off the kitchen. She can go outside, and she’s got a big TV on the wall above the French doors.”

roofline, which didn’t have any visual appeal.” Adding gables, a dormer, and a bay window for added dimension; interesting architectural eye candy like copper awning and gutters, custom shutters, and recurring arches; and a thoroughly handsome hardscape and landscape resulted in a look that marries Old-World charm with refined modernity.

The finished porch is an airy refuge awash in diffused natural light. Pops of verdant green punctuate the elegant mix of neutral seating: a gorgeous custom bed swing, comfy linen slipcovered chairs, and an heirloom wicker sofa in white—a color palette that seems to mirror the surrounding trees against the gauzy sky. The porch spills into the kitchen, which is Misso’s favorite room in the home. “We vaulted the ceilings, created a custom built-in for her heirloom china, and gave her an island with the pendants that she loves,” she says. “There was just such a dramatic visual difference in the before and after.”

The chic cooking space shares an open-concept floor plan with the main living room. Both are prime entertaining areas that are

anchored by a central circular table, usually punctuated by a stunning floral arrangement, as it also serves as the focal point from the entry hall. This dynamic central area, nicknamed “the dog trot,” is a hub between party zones, so it naturally doubles as a perfect spot to serve refreshments. From there, guests can wander through the foyer, where a perfectly appointed private dining room is tucked away behind custom doors, creating an air of intimacy and the promise of a nostalgic dining experience.

The home captures the elegance of Southern entertaining, which was exactly what the homeowner had envisioned from the start, and that was Misso’s favorite thing about this project. “That was the most fun part for me—having their trust and cultivating that cohesive design that supported their functional needs and heirloom pieces. Her beautiful antiques just spoke for themselves, so we made sure that we kept it very elegant and traditional, so that it looked updated yet true to her style,” she says.



Left: The laid-back downstairs den and adjacent guest suite mix modernity with the homeowner's heirloom treasures. Above and below: Misso achieved an "intentional yet elevated" feel in the bathrooms with Carrara and Volakas marble, custom cabinetry, jewelry-like hardware, and gorgeous mirror accents. Right: Originally in a jarring yellow fabric, the antique stool at the foot of the bed was a serendipitous find from Maison de France in Leeds. "We had it reupholstered in the same brown velvet and white trim from her bolster," says Misso. "The homeowner loves it."



BEFORE