

Southern Accents

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The house had all the

makings of a grand English country estate—formal Georgian architecture, classical details inside and out, and 12 lush acres, all in the middle of Atlanta.

For the prospective owners, there was just one problem: As much as they coveted the property, it didn't fit the lifestyle of a busy family with three children. But the couple knew a good thing when they saw it, so they bought the house and set out to make it work. "The house is extremely formal, but my husband and I are not," says the lady of the house. "We've tried to make it a bit more family-friendly."

Shortly after buying the house in the tony neighborhood of Buckhead, the couple hired Atlanta designer Suzanne Kasler to soften the formality by freshening it up for a lively family. From an aesthetic perspective, the last thing the designer wanted was for the décor to upstage the interior's classical details. In fact, one of her goals was to give the house, then two years old, a slight patina that would dull its new-construction

Dramatic moldings take center stage in the living room. The neutral tones are accented with raspberry elements, such as the bands on the chair slipcovers. LEFT: Designer Suzanne Kasler is known for her polished yet family-friendly interiors.





The foyer's large-scale pediments, intricate moldings, and a black-and-white marble floor set the stage for a house rich in classical architecture. A Russian mahogany table anchors the space. LEFT: Contemporary elements, such as a modern sofa topped by a quilted throw, tone down the formality of the living room.



feel. "We didn't want to overly decorate, but to play up the architecture and the views," Kasler recalls, "so that the textures and finishes are what you really feel." The whole project, therefore, became a balancing act of new and old, form and function.

Based on that challenge, the homeowners thought, who better to get in on the act than the original residential designer, William T. Baker of Atlanta. With its luxurious ornamentation, the house was one of his favorites. So much so that it is one of 28 projects featured in his recently published book, *New Classicists* (Images Publishing Group, 2004). "The house is very special because it incorporates hand-carved Indiana limestone," Baker says. Each capital atop the limestone Corinthian columns on the exterior features a different Southern flower. A Vermont slate roof complements the façade's wood-molded red brick and the egg-and-dart molding on the cornice.

Inside the house, Baker continued his attention to intricate details with mantels and bookcases he designed and a grand double-curved staircase fashioned after an iron one from the 1700s. "Our attempt was to capture the look and feel of an



18th-century English country estate," he says.

It worked. But with children ages 15, 13, and 10, the family had 21st-century needs. Builder Mark Palmer, who served as general contractor on the original construction, finished the basement to add a media room, wine cellar, and office. The family also requested a separate structure for housing guests, so Baker designed a freestanding garage with a workshop and guest quarters that the wife has jokingly dubbed the "Garage Mahal." The structure mirrors the existing attached garage, which in turn was reconfigured to create a mudroom, storage area, and additional entrance to the house.

Inside, the challenge for Kasler was not allowing the décor to look too planned. Instead, the couple wanted a subtle backdrop for the art and furnishings they hope to acquire as they travel. Because the wife loves design, she was very involved in the process. "We used a mix of antiques, some of which they had, that were timeless but fresh enough for a young family," says Kasler.

In the living room, Baker's signature dramatic moldings and pediments became even more pronounced when complemented by a subtle color scheme on the walls, trim, and ceiling. Kasler relied on a tone-on-tone scheme, emphasizing shades of bone on the walls and ceiling, to accomplish this. In the foyer, where a black-and-white marble floor



sets the classical stage, the designer used a bone wax on the walls and painted the pediments above the entries to the adjacent rooms to add patina. "We wanted to age the house a bit," Kasler says. "At the same time, we really wanted to create warmth and a casual elegance."

Sisal rugs were used throughout the house, and many chairs, including the Chippendale chairs in the dining room, were slipcovered—touches that attempt to make the rooms more casual. In the wood-paneled library, contemporary light fixtures over the bookcase and a simple gold-framed mirror wake up the otherwise dark and serious space. At one end of the living room, a modern sofa is paired with two red-checked upholstered footstools that can be moved around for different seating arrangements. Even the master suite reflects the practical needs of a young couple, with a desk that separates a sitting area from the sleeping area.

The place may have the feel of a rambling English country estate, but for this young family, the reality is life in Atlanta's fast lane. ♦

For details, see Sourcebook, page 186.