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Overgrown with briars, the property had little to recommend it. The original structure had been moved away and a sand and gravel quarry had stripped and shredded the terrain. The vegetation was so dense that walking the land was nearly impossible. But Tom Crowley saw past all that, envisioning a spacious, comfortable home with sweeping views and all the natural play space his six children could ever want. It didn't matter that no one—no one—thought the land was worth owning, much less building a house on.

"They said, 'There's no way you can do this,'" Tom says about friends, fellow real estate professionals, even his wife, Leah, who was content with their home in a nearby neighborhood. "Fortunately, I don't take direction too well," he says, laughing.

You could say Tom has had the last laugh. After purchasing the 60 acres near Indianapolis in 2002, he embarked on a crusade to tame the land—even operating a bulldozer himself on weekends—and build a family-friendly compound with a color palette and design plan informed by nature.

"This was not for the meek-hearted, let me tell you," Tom says. "But I wanted a place where our kids could just be kids." There's a lake full of bass, several centuries-old oaks and maples to climb, a pool, sledding hills, a vegetable garden, and soon, an orchard. That's not even mentioning the amenities of the expan-

sive stone house, including a bunk room for sleepovers and a porch with a fireplace where the family gathers to roast marshmallows and talk about the day. "We are home a lot. We spend a lot of time with each other," Leah says. And that was the point. Tom, who grew up roaming the central Illinois countryside, saw an opportunity to give his children the free-range environment and solid home base he had enjoyed as a child.

Working with an Atlanta-based design team of architectural designer William T. Baker, landscape architect Alec Michaelides, and interior designer Suzanne Kasler, the Crowleys spent two years planning how to turn the vision into a reality. Restoring the landscape was of utmost importance, and the challenge lay in designing a house to complement the property's features.

Baker suggested the English manor vernacular, which would suit the vast grounds without being imposing. He carefully placed all the main living spaces, as well as the master suite, to take in the view of the lake. Michaelides helped site the home around the grand old trees. And, not wanting to compete with what would be outside the walls, Kasler began formulating an interior palette of subtle, organic colors.

At the start of the 20-month construction phase, Tom selected a Tennessee fieldstone to clad the exterior of the house. An uncommon material because of the variety of tones and hues



in every batch, it turned out to be an inspired—if tricky—choice. Tom, who visited the site three times a day, and builder Leonard Watson oversaw the placement of the stones. “The pattern is really important,” Tom says. “If you don’t lay it right, it’ll be very pink.”

So impressed by the shadings in the stone, Kasler mined its silvery gray, buff, cream, and dusky russet hues to ply inside the house as well. In the living room, she made use of the smoky-blues, accented with bone and golden tan. “I love to use color so that its presence is felt but not dramatic,” Kasler says.

Grass cloth wall covering tinted the color of the lake on a clear day sets an elegant mood in the dining room, and Kasler colored the ceiling shimmery gold to create a heightened aura during dinner parties. As the rooms become more casual, the colors intensify. Copper, the color of a worn penny, appears on chenille-upholstered armchairs in the family room. In the space outside the children’s rooms, the walls are painted in clarified tones of sky blue, lively coral, and sunshine yellow.

Confident in the color selections she offered for the home, Kasler was building on a 15-year working relationship with Tom from when she used to live in Indianapolis. She knew where his design sensibilities lay: nothing too flashy, nothing too cavernous, nothing too modern. “Tom wanted me to make a house that’s timeless, classic, and would get better and better looking as it gets older,” she says.







To do that, Kasler started at the front door, which opens to a vaulted hallway leading a short distance to French doors and the vista from the back of the house. It is bisected by a longer hallway that opens up to all the rooms. "Architecturally, the foyer was the key concept for the house," Kasler says. "The rest of the rooms unfold from there." In this space, large rough-cut limestone tiles are solid underfoot, plaster walls have a velvety old-world quality, and carved woodwork harkens to an earlier era. To highlight the foyer's architecture and view, Kasler elected to cast a muted ivory hue from ceiling to floor.

By intention, elegant architecture and decorating camouflage the house's practical hardiness, Leah says. The stone floors and painted woodwork wear well with constant traffic. Several sets of French doors offer immediate access to the yard and are handy during competitive games of tag.

In the kitchen, granite countertops, dual dishwashers, and a commercial-grade sink faucet help Leah serve up snacks and meals for dozens of kids—her own plus visiting friends. A pair of islands hold hors d'oeuvres when adults crowd the kitchen and adjoining family room. "There is truly not a room in this house that we don't use," Leah says.

When they can be persuaded to come indoors, Tom and Leah's children—Kendall, 12; Gabrielle, 11; Michael, 9; and Gressa, 7—hang out with their parents in the spacious kitchen and adjoining family room. Then they head to their bedrooms



Opposite: Paneled walls and antique wood beams mark the casual family room. Armchairs and sofas upholstered in coral- and chocolate-hued chenille fabrics are made for barefoot lounging.

Top: All of the Crowley youngsters use the bunk room as a play space, and it's the hub of activity for sleepovers with friends and cousins. The built-ins were wired to allow for reading lights above each bed.

Above: Tom and Leah Crowley have six children, with (from left) Kendall, Gabrielle, Gressa, and Michael living at home full-time.



niches, moldings, columns, and fireplaces gave the structure personality and interesting details to embellish.

To contrast the wood tones of all of the architectural elements and stretch a sun-kissed radiance throughout the house, a golden color was layered onto freshly stuccoed walls. "I always want to honor the architecture of a house," says Linda. "I wanted this house to mimic the style and flavor of New Mexico.

"In my research, I also discovered scallop details, and I used them everywhere—from the decoration on the furniture to the molding that follows the staircase, to the hood that hangs over the range in the kitchen. The scallop offers a consistent theme from room to room."

In the living room, the fabrics on a trio of French, American, and English armchairs take their color cues of pink, black, and moss green from the rug rolled out onto the wide-planked wood floor. Instead of a typical arrangement anchored by a sofa, the three mismatched chairs form a central unit around a 19th-century English antique table cut to coffee table height.

The kitchen started as a small galley-style space. To make it larger, Linda eliminated a narrow interior hallway and incorporated the space into the kitchen, creating an open and colorful Mexican *cocina*. Cabinets, painted and distressed in gold, apricot, and terra-cotta, were made to look more like furniture than built-ins. An antique English store counter-turned-island gets a bold color boost with a red finish and a new, distressed

French zinc top. While all of the other light fixtures in the house are old, the kitchen light fixture, made in Holland, breaks the rules with its playfully dangling spoons and forks.

Although Linda enjoys the time she spends indoors among her vivid surroundings, she needs only to step outside to find tranquility. The natural beauty reminds her of the glorious tones that sparked her color scheme.

"The landscape in Santa Fe is extraordinarily colorful," Linda says. "Brown-and-white interiors with a Colonial West flavor are common in Santa Fe, but I wanted to bring in the warm, nurturing colors of terra-cotta, apricot, and gold that celebrate nature. That's where my design direction comes from. Nature repeats color over and over again, but in different values. Nature doesn't match anything, and neither does my house. There's always a happy surprise." ■

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Opposite: The bed, painted in a cheerful palette of terra-cotta and yellow with green accents, features a whimsical silhouette with star- and heart-shaped cutouts. An antique French chandelier adds a touch of formality to the rustic look of the viga (log beam) ceiling that's typical of the Indian and Spanish architecture of the Southwest.

Above: A deck off the master bedroom, where colorful outdoor fabric covers casual furniture, offers a relaxing place to enjoy the sunset and other features of the spectacular Santa Fe landscape.

Designer Suzanne Kasler chose the gauzy blue of a winter sky on walls and chairs in the living room, then warmed up the area with a pale camel rug, table skirt, and sofa. A limestone mantel and carved moldings replicate elements of an English manor house.

Opposite: Expanses of glass allow light to pour into the room.

Preceding pages: Aqua and cream with a dusting of metallic finishes give the dining room's neoclassical style a youthful twist. **Children, from left:** Gabrielle, Michael, Kendall, and Gressa Crowley play beneath an old oak tree.

