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Familiar Territory

Bespoke appointments and family heirlooms lend a been-there-forever feel to a 1920s Austin abode.

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Interior Design: Liz MacPhail, Liz MacPhail Interiors Home Builder: Dustin Minium, Red Tail Construction



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o say I know this house would be an understatement,” muses designer Liz MacPhail of her clients’ charming 1920s Austin residence. Having lived across the street from the abode for years, she even worked on a remodel of the house next door.

So, MacPhail was thrilled when her close friend, now neighbor, scooped it up when it came on the market—and even more ecstatic when she was called upon to help guide the proud new owner and her husband through a thoughtful redesign.

From the get-go, MacPhail knew this wouldn’t be the usual project—because the wife is not a typical client. The owner’s passion for design and keen eye for detail rival those of many veteran interior designers. Moreover, she has amassed a personal collection of decorating books and shelter publications that could compete with any design studio library. The client, who collaborated with Rick & Cindy Black Architects on details such as paint colors and the sunroom’s tile flooring before MacPhail signed on, had essentially spent years gathering inspiration. “During our meetings, she presented her ideas through dog-eared book pages and stacks of magazine clippings, as opposed to pulling up photos on Instagram or Pinterest,” MacPhail recounts. In a way, these old-school gestures are a testament to the owner’s penchant for the past as well as her more traditional tendencies. “I see a lot of beautiful modern and minimal projects,” adds the designer, “but it was refreshing to work alongside someone who shares my passion for style rooted in sentiment and history.”

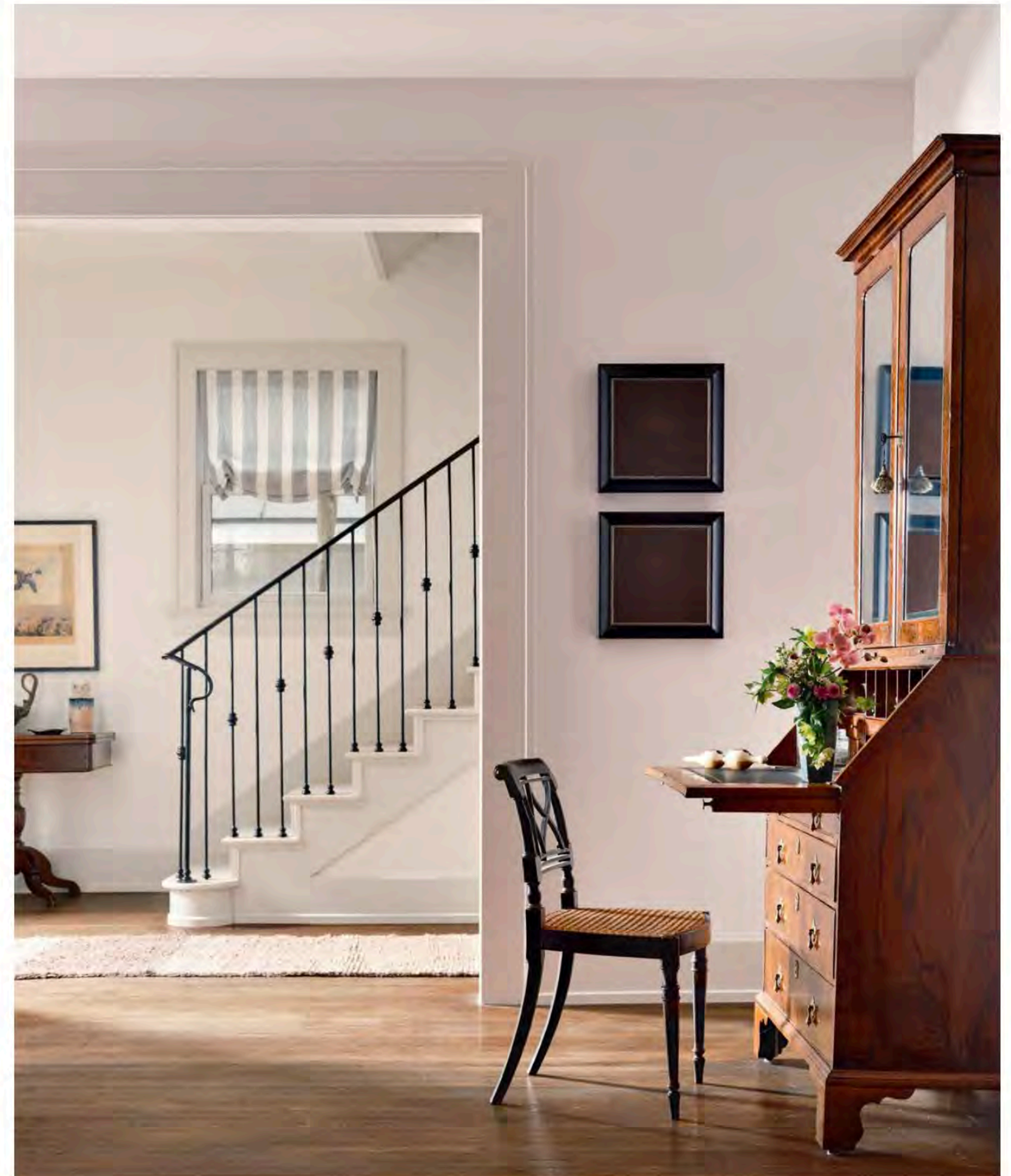
To MacPhail’s delight, the homeowners also came to the project with an expansive inventory of family antiques and ancestral portraits. These pieces work with many newly found treasures—19th-century English tables and case goods in beautiful burl woods, French fauteuils and bergères with painted and polychromed finishes—to honor both the architecture and the owners’ heritage. Meanwhile, crisp white walls and rich chestnut-stained floors, implemented by builder Dustin Minium, forge cohesion among an eclectic mix featuring rattan chairs, bamboo shades and handwoven Abaca

rugs. Such effortless balance the more formal heirlooms and a handful of opulent new additions, including sleek Italian brass mirrors, klismos chairs with tiger-print seats and flouncy pink floor-to-ceiling draperies. “We also replaced ceiling fixtures in the entry and living room with clean-lined Cubism designs as an immediate acknowledgment of the contemporary and vintage mix throughout,” the designer notes.

Such unexpected twists and turns usher the eye from room to room, highlighting details like tassel trim and bullion fringe while allowing each statement-making fabric a moment to shine. But while nostalgic florals, checks, toiles and stripes call to mind an air of proper European elegance, playful color palettes and exaggerated scales exalt a modern aesthetic. “The process of sourcing and selecting fabrics felt like putting together a giant jigsaw puzzle,” recalls MacPhail. “When the frame was set, we added in pieces one by one until we could see the big picture. It was a lengthy process, but it was fun and well worth the time we invested.”

While the overall design was largely defined by the elements brought in, it was also loosely shaped by those strategically left out. MacPhail fostered an easy flow throughout the interiors by focusing on sparse furniture arrangements comprised solely of pieces with a distinct use or purpose. She also applied this “less is more” philosophy to the decor. “Nothing distracts from the beauty and simplicity of the pieces in each room,” says the designer. Tabletop trinkets, decorative accents and superfluous accessories were kept to a minimum, leaving surfaces exposed for a look that reads current and tailored as opposed to stodgy and cluttered.

As evidenced by this home, MacPhail’s goal is never to match or even coordinate furnishings, but rather to marry together everything the client loves regardless of period, provenance, color, pattern or texture. “Good design is all about creating balance through contrast,” the designer explains. “You need the light and heavy, the minimal and maximal, the eclectic and elegant, the old and new. I also want to help the clients dream and scheme spaces that make them smile and give them butterflies.” While there is no formula for creating that kind of excitement or anticipation, MacPhail reveals, “it will happen when you trust the process, use what you love and follow your intuition.” ■



Beyond the living room, the entry’s custom iron rail showcases a streamlined profile. The vintage runner is from Reiss Studio and a Roman shade fabricated by Austintatious Blinds & Shutters features Coraggio’s Ferrara linen-blend sheer from Wells Abbott.

A Highland House living room sofa with a Samuel & Sons bullion fringe faces a Louis XVI-style bergère chair and John Derian for Cisco Home chair in a Pierre Frey floral. The Urban Electric Co.'s flush mount lights a Patterson Flynn rug. Klismos chairs don a Scalamandré fabric.





Left: Checkerboard floors mix with Christopher Moore's Crayford chintz from Wells Abbott on the sunroom sofa. A vintage metal garden chair rounds out the alfresco flair.

Opposite: Arched sunroom windows with trim painted Benjamin Moore's Wythe Blue feel fresh alongside an heirloom desk with florals by Serracinna Studio. The antique desk chair is from Found.





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An ebony Louis XVI-style table with brass casters and accents grounds the dining room painted Benjamin Moore's Gardenia. The elegantly appointed space also features chairs covered in a gingham by Maison de Vacances and an antique crystal chandelier purchased at Wirthmore Antiques.



Above: Visual interest is maximized in the powder room with Pierre Frey's Les Ombrelles pattern backing a custom vanity featuring a scalloped backsplash. The unlacquered brass faucet by Waterworks is from J&L Hardware.

Opposite: Marvic Textiles' La Chasse graces the custom platform bed and barrel-back armchair in the primary bedroom. Roman shades in Rosa Bernal Strypes A dress the windows. The Graves task lamp is Visual Comfort.