

This family ditched a more formal dining room in favor of an amped up eat-in kitchen with a large island covered in a leathered stone countertop and overhang for casual seating.

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From top to bottom, floor to ceiling, this home designed by Heather Garrett is magic... a few years in the making.

> By Anne Marie Ashley Photography by John Bessler

The warm reds and blues of the antique rug mingle perfectly with the modern touch of gold pendant lights in this elegant yet welcoming entryway.

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esigner Heather Garrett is no stranger to design challenges. So when her Internet entrepreneur clients called on her to redesign their newly purchased Tuscan style estate in Chapel Hill, she took on the project with gusto. "This young couple

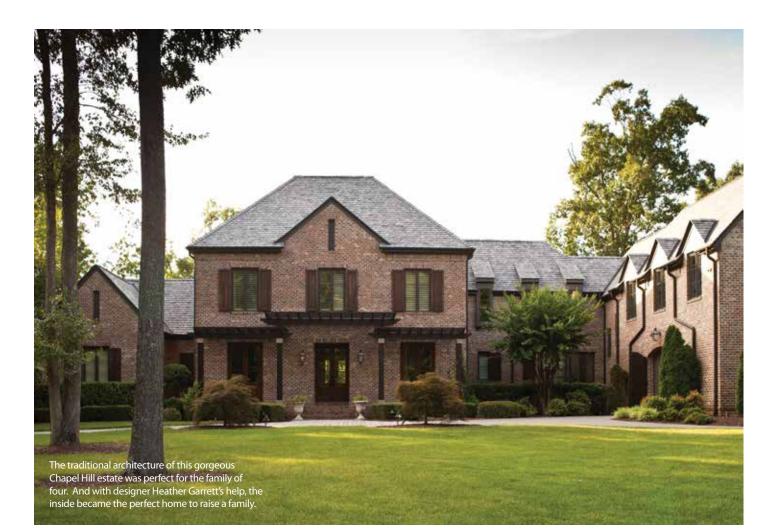
had a really relaxed approach to life, living with dogs and had a baby on the way," Garrett says. "They purchased this fully furnished estate that was dripping with Tuscan style. Think heavy furniture, deep walls, and hanging tapestries. They wanted instead to be sunny, fresh, and chic, but in appropriate measure for the traditional architecture."

The couple both graduated from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill but had since settled in Durham. With a new baby on the way, a travel-heavy work schedule for the husband, and a recent windfall, they both agreed that moving back to Chapel Hill would provide the peace of mind and way of life they were seeking. The home sits on the fairway of the Chapel Hill Country Club, and planning for a growing family, this idyllic property was a perfect choice.

The plans for the nursery were under way in their current home, so when they decided to move, the clock was ticking to bring these plans up to speed in the new home and prepare for baby.

"There was a chemistry there from the get-go with these people," Garrett says. "And we grew together slowly on projects as we hit benchmarks that made it clear I really understood their needs. We have a great trust now." Once the nursery was completed and their sweet baby boy was introduced into the world, they asked Garrett to get to work on the kitchen and living room so that they could spend time together as a family in those spaces.

With the parents working from home and a family that loved the outdoors, enjoying a very casual lifestyle, Garrett's goal was to create a home that transitioned seamlessly from work to play. Over the next three to four years, she was able to create a haven for this family of four, working room by room to perfect their living lifestyle – and ending, appropriately, with another nursery for their second baby—*a girl*.





Venetian plaster walls installed by CAN Decorative Painting add to the rustic, cozy feel of the family room. Sofas covered in indoor/outdoor linen fabric removes the stress of upkeep that comes with young children and pets.

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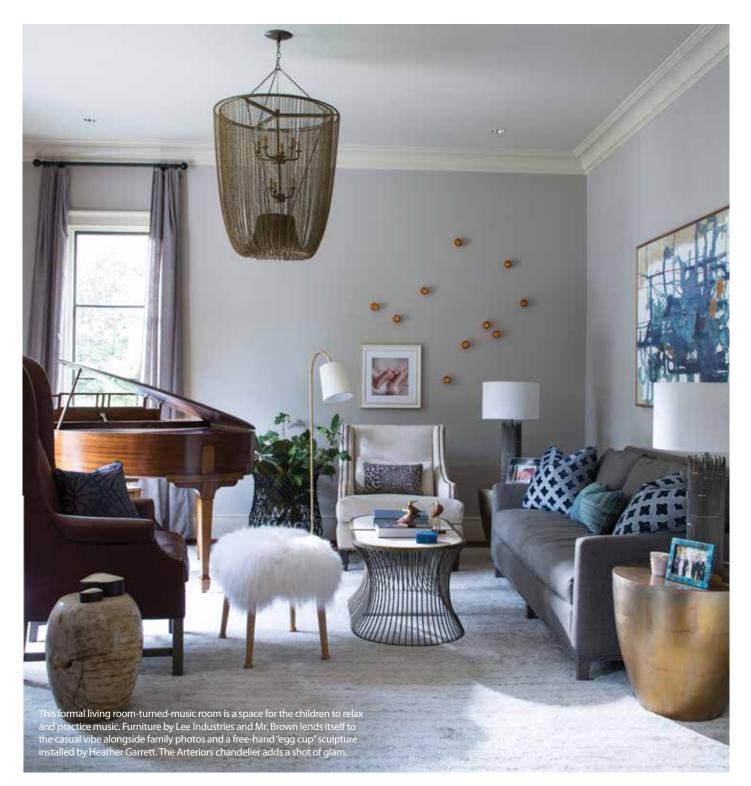
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"I think the practicalities of life are my biggest driver in creating good design for my clients," Garrett explains. "I have two teenagers at home, and pets, and I am fascinated with how we've completely changed how we live in a certain room just over a period of a few years." To that end, Garrett kept this philosophy in mind when planning the design for the master suite and master bath. The dark green walls, leather furniture, and formal sitting room were exchanged for a brighter, whiter look, a yoga space, and a play area in front of the fireplace to enjoy their children. The resulting bedroom was a true retreat with separate spaces for sleeping and relaxing. The master bath became spacious and bright with a Frenchchic vibe.

"We pulled the shutters off the windows, painted the room white, and filled it with pale textiles - vintage linen, wool, and velvet," Garrett says. "As for the master bath, we removed the vanity and cabinetry, reformatted the placement, and installed a large mirror in front of the window so that light could enter, but privacy was preserved."

As Garrett says, it's safe to assume that you will never change your personality or patterns just to accommodate a newly decorated room in your home, so it's best to plan it realistically, not ideally. In the case of her clients, formal living and dining rooms were nice in theory but impractical in lifestyle. They were replaced with a music room, complete with piano, and a moody, sophisticated entry and living space including a custom mural that whimsically winds its way up the staircase.



Heather Garrett may seem like a one-woman show, packing all the punch of a heavyweight designer in one tiny package, but she does have help from time to time. "Melonie St. John has sewn every custom piece I've ever made for fifteen years," she credits. "She's amazing and we have a secret language at this point. Her work is all over this project from pillows to window treatments." Garrett also called on CAN Decorative Painting to touch nearly every surface in the home, because, as she says, "wall finishes and nuanced texture are such an important part of a finished look."

To round out the decor, Garrett shopped at Eliko Rugs, Oly Studio, and Lee Industries, as well as Julian Chichester, Made Goods, Eatman's Carpet & Interiors, Trove, and of course, Target. "When in doubt, always arrange objects in odd numbers and heights; you can rarely go wrong that way!"

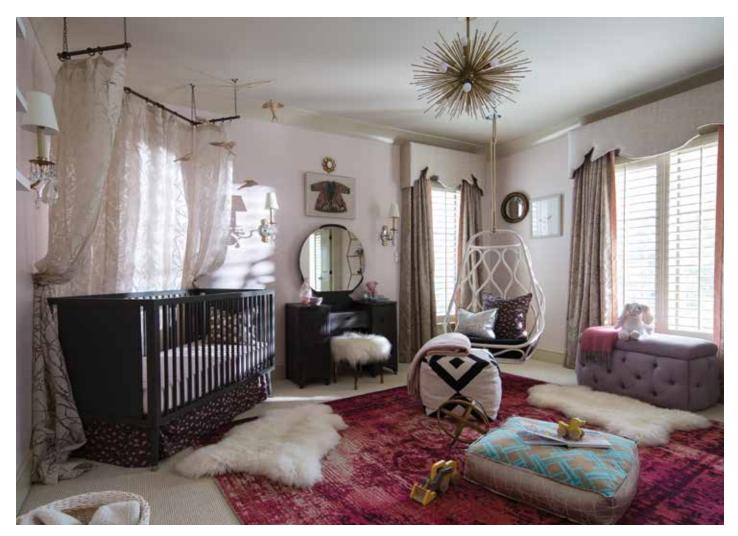
At the end of the day, Garrett was able to transform a dark and heavily Italian-influenced home into a refreshing dose of modern, casual living that made her client's new house a true

The original dining room was transformed into another casual living room where the family could gather together. Grasscloth-covered walls by Phillip Jeffries and a leathercovered ottoman create a relaxed, homey feel while a painting by Utah artist Tyler Huntzinger of birds on a wire hangs beautifully over the Chesterfield sofa.

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home. This enterprising family is on their way to the next adventure, this time moving to Boulder, Colorado. So you can look for this gorgeous gem to be on the market in the very near future.◆

Top: A custom canopy drapes dreamily over baby girl's crib and the fuchsia rug from West Elm fills the room with a feminine vibe. A hanging swing takes the place of a rocker for a bit of fun, and her grandmother's antique vanity imparts a sense of heritage. *Left:* Custom glazed striped walls painted by CAN Decorative Painting take this baby boy's room to big brother status.