

Triangle

APRIL / MAY 2018

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Designer Kara Cox takes a neutral palette to the next level



Personal TOUCH

A homeowner sees past a builder's choices in a spec house to add his mark on new construction.

By Dana W. Todd
Photography by Stacey Van Berkel

For some people, buying a turnkey home is ideal. It's move-in ready. However, one particular homeowner, a father of three, had a slightly different approach when he purchased a builder spec house near Greensboro. Instead of living in the house as-is, he envisioned more than just what the builder had in mind. After researching local interior designers who shared his passion for modern art and color, he chose Kara Cox of Kara Cox Interiors to design a home that fit his lifestyle as well as his art collection.

"Most who buy a new house don't want to make changes," Cox says, "but this homeowner was open to making changes to fit his lifestyle."

With three kids who visit on the weekends and a busy work travel schedule during the week, the homeowner trusted Cox to turn this 3,000-square-foot Cape Cod bungalow into a colorful modern-classic design. To fit his specific lifestyle, Cox focused on making the open downstairs layout, which includes the master suite, functional for him and the upstairs bedrooms lively and resilient for enthusiastic kids on the weekends, incorporating colorful artwork into all the spaces.

Opposite: Stair carpeting from Stanton is given a dose of masculinity with nail head trim, while the light color theme is continued with a Tibetan rug from Moattar at the foot of the stairs. An unusually shaped mirror from Interlude Home tops the Lucite console.



The home office features Phillip Jeffries grasscloth wallcovering, Hickory Chair swivel chairs, and AERIN for Visual Comfort floor lamps.

Opposite: Cox designed the bar, formerly just a base cabinet installed by the builder, by adding an upper mirrored cabinet, a white zen quartz countertop, and a Carrara marble herringbone pattern backsplash.

"Since art is so important, we repainted or recovered all the walls in lighter and brighter colors, removing the deep grays and trendier colors chosen by the builder," Cox explains. These color changes make a better backdrop for the homeowner's modern art.

"We further highlighted artwork in the house by minimizing patterns and using accent colors," Cox continues.

"The whole house design started with one piece of 3-D paper artwork purchased in Paris from a Japanese artist, which is now hanging in the dining room. That room contained the only wall downstairs large enough to accommodate the huge forty-eight-inch by sixty-inch piece. It was the only piece of artwork the homeowner asked me to work around, and it is so different from the softer colors he wanted throughout the house. When you walk by this particular piece, it appears yellow in one direction and red if you walk by in the other direction. It is a true statement piece and served as both the design challenge and inspiration for the house."

Surrounded by lighter neutrals, the





Cox focused on making the open downstairs layout functional for him and the upstairs bedrooms lively and resilient for enthusiastic kids on the weekends.



Left: A light gray and white kitchen is accented with pops of yellow and red in keeping with the artwork in the nearby dining room. Hickory Chair bar stools in a kid-friendly Kravet vinyl covering steal the show. The hanging pendants are from Visual Comfort.

Right: The artwork in the dining room led the house's design and is the focal point in this room. Accessories in soft colors balance out the bold artwork, including dining chairs covered in Thibaut Crypton fabric, a Stanton indoor/outdoor rug perfect for children, and an eye-catching light fixture by Oly Studio.

3-D art becomes a focal point of the dining room. Since the dining room opens to the living area, Cox introduced pops of red and yellow to mix with the lighter base colors in the living room to keep the two spaces cohesive.

The owner purchased all the other artwork especially for this house, and Cox used it as part of her color mix in each room.

Since incorporating original artwork is part of Cox's specialty, it was a particularly pleasant project where the homeowner put full confidence and control in her hands.

In addition to a fresh, light colorway, Cox introduced masculine elements to keep the spaces appropriate for the homeowner. Nail head trim on the runner going up the stairs,



for instance, accessorizes the blue, taupe, and tan carpeting. Grasscloth wallcovering and shades of blue in the home office add other hints of masculinity as well as texture and dimension.

The home office is another example where Cox infused the

owner's personality into the house by changing the builder's original concept. Initially presented as a front library painted dark gray, Cox turned the room into a multifunctional space to give the homeowner a place to work from home. She recovered





the walls in neutral grasscloth, designed a desk with built-in bookcases and cabinetry surrounding it, and painted the trim and built-ins in a lacquered shade of light blue in keeping with the colorful theme of the home.

Left: A Hickory Chair sectional sofa upholstered in Kravet indoor/outdoor fabric receives touches of color with throw pillows covered in Jim Thompson blue mohair and Romo floral print.

Right: Original art by Kate Long Stevenson and a pale tufted headboard from Hickory Chair draw the eye in the master bedroom.

Pine Cone Hill bedding and a custom headboard and bed skirt give a masculine vibe in blue, brown, tan, and cream.





Similarly, she turned a lonely base cabinet in a corner of the kitchen into a functional mini bar with a built-in wine cooler and drawers for storing supplies. Cox added upper cabinetry to hold wine glasses and enhanced it with a mirrored back, adding depth and interest to the corner.

As a final act, Cox changed out all the builder-grade lighting fixtures and cabinet hardware to reflect a more modern aesthetic, which infused personality into the home.

"This type of project is my favorite," Cox says, "with a homeowner willing to add art and design around it. He took risks with artwork and the use of color, listened, and trusted my instincts. In the end, he has a kid-friendly home that also is functional for his needs."

"My advice to homeowners in a similar situation when shopping for a new home is to remember someone else has chosen the personal finishes. It's OK to customize it for your style. Just because it's new doesn't mean you can't change it."♦



Left: A custom headboard covered in a Pierre Frey print stands out in a child's bedroom with a touch of sophistication added by the graphic black-and-white pillow made with Schumacher fabric. Turquoise gourd lamps are from Lamps Plus.

Top Right: An antique nightstand is at home beside a bed with a custom Kravet woven fabric headboard. The standout piece is the custom pillow in John Robshaw fabric by Duralee.

Bottom Right: A mini office resides in the girl's room, combining femininity and boldness with a fur-covered chair and a desk with brass base.