

Charlotte

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The painting of Beyoncé by Charlie Hanavich, purchased from Hidell Brooks Gallery, replaced a more traditional landscape. "That one change completely energized the room," says Austin. A sofa by Parish Hadley Design, purchased from Baker Furniture, is paired with side and coffee tables by Amy Howard from Circa Interiors.

DESIGN LAB

TEXT BY BLAKE MILLER | PHOTOGRAPHY BY DUSTIN PECK



INFUSED WITH HEART AND PERSONALITY, DESIGNER CATHY AUSTIN'S HOME IS A FABULOUS TESTING GROUND FOR INFINITE DESIGN POSSIBILITIES FOR CLIENTS.



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NED AND CATHY AUSTIN could never quite find the perfect home for their family of four. When their search commenced in 2006, it felt like every home they toured was dark, dated, and lacked character. Having grown up in Myers Park, Ned was “spoiled with the large, towering oaks,” according to Cathy, so any home lacking an ample tree canopy was off the list.

The couple had just about given up their search when a neighbor mentioned a home about to hit the market, located on a quiet cul-de-sac in Barclay Downs. At her urging, they went to see it. Despite its stuck-in-the-eighties aesthetic—“It looked like it was straight out of an eighties Ralph Lauren ad,” laughs designer Cathy Austin—the couple fell in love with the home’s solid bones and picturesque, tree-filled yard. “The proportion, the scale, everything about the home’s foundation was fantastic,” she says.

After a few cosmetic updates, Austin’s wheels began to turn with ideas on how to install just the right design scheme—one that consisted of a cozy place to gather and live daily life as a family of four coupled with Austin’s love of art and antiques. As a designer, her home became a sort of design lab over the years, where she would test out various trends and looks before employing them in her client projects. “I would say, ‘Look! You can do this and that and it’s not the end of the world!’” she says. “When people see how well it works in my own home and I’m not afraid to try it, they oftentimes get on board.”

As a designer, Austin’s calling card is that she doesn’t have one. In fact, her aesthetic is chameleon, pulling design details from traditional to modern and blending them seamlessly into one carefully curated style. Her personal home is no different—a collection of traditional and contemporary artwork, antiques, and fabrics that look effortlessly elegant and sophisticated all at once. “I believe that when designing, you should buy the best when you can and those pieces will grow with you,” she says. “The pieces that are really made well you can tweak and change as you move forward.”

That approach is exactly what Austin employed in her home over the last sixteen years, cultivating collections of antiques and fine art from local and southeastern galleries like Hidell Brooks and SOCO. Pieces by Selena Beaudry, Amanda Stone Talley, and Liz Nielsen informed the color palettes and design of each room. “That’s what I like to do: start with the decorative items in the house and let those lead me to the palette,” she says, “instead of designing the room and adding the art last.”

The result is a home that fully exemplifies Austin’s style and truly makes her happy. “The pandemic has caused us to rethink our interiors and create spaces that lift our spirits and produce a sense of optimism with jubilant colors and patterns,” she says. “A home should be a haven that provides relaxation and a calming influence. I try to practice what I preach by using this as a guide post in my own home.” ♦



Austin loves to use her house as a testing ground and design lab for clients to visualize design concepts in their own space.

In the foyer, Austin pulled the "dirty pink" from the Moroccan rug for the wall color, creating a unifying theme that is consistent throughout the house. The runner from Stark Carpet complements the Selena Beaudry art from Hidell Brooks Gallery. Art above the slipper chair is by Brad Thomas from SOCO Gallery.







ABOVE: Austin calls the living room her “cabinet of curiosities.” The space is chock-full of watercolors and paintings from her favorite destinations as well as items gifted to her from friends, and picked up at museum exhibitions and travels abroad.

OPPOSITE: Late artist Terry Reitzel painted the stunning cherry blossom mural in Austin’s dining room. The designer pulled the same pink from the nearby foyer for the blossom color and the ceiling. Norbar window treatments and a custom chandelier designed by Austin complete the space.





The Austins spend most of their time in the family room, where a multicolored wool rug from Schumacher hides a multitude of sins from heavy foot traffic. Above the fireplace, art by Amanda Talley from Hidell Brooks Gallery offers a focal point, and a Baker sofa and Charles Stewart chairs are covered in Thibaut fabric from A. Hoke.

A large abstract painting anchors one wall in Austin's studio, while a table skirted in Schuyler Samperton Textiles can be used for additional desk space or as a bar when entertaining clients. The lamps are from Mainly Baskets. **OPPOSITE:** The studio's design was inspired by a Bahamian cottage and features white walls, a conch-pink colored ceiling with a Serena & Lily chandelier, a sisal rug from Karen Saks, and a custom sofa covered in a Kravet fabric.









ABOVE: An oversized Otomi-embroidered textile purchased in Sayulita, Mexico, hangs above a discontinued Barbara Barry vanity Austin found at Scott Antique Markets in Atlanta. The chair by Celerie Kemble for Henredon is covered in Kravet fabric, and Visual Comfort lamps from Circa Lighting add just the right ambiance.

OPPOSITE: Austin designed this space for a designer showhome knowing it would eventually become a permanent design for her primary bedroom. Bedside lamps by Louise Gaskill and an Aerin Lauder for Visual Comfort chandelier from Circa Lighting add interest to the space. A custom bench swathed in Brunschwig & Fils fabric sits at the end of the bed.