



HOME STORY

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AUSTIN INTERIOR DESIGN COUPLE MELINDA AND JOHN THOMAS JAMES BELIEVE A HOME TELLS A STORY ABOUT THE RESIDENTS INSIDE. AS DESIGNERS, IT'S THEIR JOB TO BRING THAT STORY TO LIFE FOR THEIR CLIENTS — AND EVEN THEMSELVES.



MELINDA AND JOHN THOMAS JAMES SHARE A LOVE of curated, storied design that led them to become partners in life and business. As owners of M. James Design Group, the couple works together to create beautiful spaces that reflect the lives and tales of their clients in Texas and across the country.

“I like to walk through a home and make up a little story in my mind as I go along,” explained Melinda. “How will the client use this space? What inspiration will come to them? What memories will be made? I love small, individual

spaces because they make the home feel more intimate, and there’s so much more room for expression. Each room has a mood and purpose.”

Recently, John and Melinda embarked on designing a home for a new chapter of their lives as they moved from their formal Houston abode to a more casual Austin retreat. “It’s a lot harder being your own client,” said John. “You have a higher level of freedom, and with that comes a more critical eye. Melinda and I have very different approaches. I love blueprints and she is a little more

The open-concept living room and kitchen spaces are truly connected, simultaneously spilling into each other while retaining their own presence. The living space is grounded with layered white and gray Italian rugs from Stile BK and Carol Piper Rugs. On one side, a black leather sofa is framed against a white wall artfully adorned with the couple’s muted art collection. The opposite wall features a custom black and white built-in bookcase. This cozy corner is outfitted with a white oversized reading chair and daybed paired with a modern acrylic ottoman and Kelly Wearstler floor lamp for Visual Comfort. The couple’s massive book collection joyfully overflows into the kitchen, blending the two spaces. The kitchen area features French Restoration-style armchairs in antique toile from Balsac Antiques New Orleans and a sleek black woodgrain table that can serve as a casual dining spot or a place to enjoy cocktails amid lively conversation in the living room.





free-form.” Melinda added, “We each bring something different to the table. After all, you need different perspectives to tell an interesting story.”

The couple’s home features a trove of art, books and antiques beautifully arranged into dramatic vignettes throughout every room — from perfectly balanced gallery walls to playfully overflowing bookshelves. “Home is a story,” exclaimed Melinda. “We live storied and collected lives, which we should celebrate in our homes. Our collections are real and a part of our history together. We use the books on display daily.”

Their new Austin home presented design challenges for the couple. “We had a very dressy place in Houston,” said Melinda. “And we wanted to pare it down to reflect that more casual and organic Austin spirit. But, of course, we didn’t want to part with some of our

The couple converted one of the home’s bedrooms into a formal dining room with the spirit of an elevated cocktail lounge. The room is wrapped in Midnight in the Garden wallpaper by Fine and Dandy Co., a dark scenic print that brings a modern edge to a traditional motif. Rather than a stuffy dining table, the space features a sleek cocktail table with a settee and oversized slipper chairs upholstered in charcoal fabric. A large antique gilded mirror accents the room and provides romantic cameo views around the table.



more formal antiques. So, we created this more lived-in look by layering in organic textures and adding contrasting modern elements.” John explained that “juxtaposition makes things more interesting and balanced — it’s the unexpected vs. the expected.”

Taking a page from their own design book, this contrasting yet balanced couple has created a space to live, work and start the next chapter of their story together in perfect style. ♦

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