

The Best of Both Worlds

THOUGHTFULLY DESIGNED WITH A BLEND OF BOTH FORMAL AND INFORMAL SPACES, THIS VIRGINIA HOME IS AS CONDUCTIVE TO FAMILY LIVING AS IT IS TO PLAYING HOST.

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Wanting to start fresh, the couple brought almost nothing from their former home, giving designer Melanie Elston a blank canvas. "Color is something I enjoy, and I especially like mixing it in an appropriate way," Elston says, noting the lavender that carries through the dining and formal living rooms.



Rolling hills and wildflower-dotted meadows are part of the idyllic allure of the Virginia countryside. For this young family, a piece of property on the outskirts of Charlottesville had both and more. “They purchased this land years ago and decided the time was right to build on it,” interior designer Melanie Elston says. Along with an assembled brigade of professionals, including architects from long-established area firm Dalglish Gilpin Paxton, Elston was brought in to maximize these features while also creating a home that is a perfect blend of formal gathering spaces and cozy, more intimate rooms.

Starting from scratch, the vision was to carve out something uniquely their own from the land. “When I first came to the site, it was basically a jungle, anything that had not been cleared was impenetrable,” recalls landscape designer Rachel Lilly. While she identified trees and plants to save and mapped out plans to do so, architects Roger Birle and Joseph Chambers led a team on plans for the structure. “Our process is to listen to our clients and let them inform the style of the house

rather than coming in with preconceived notions—and, of course, we also listen to the cues of the land,” Birle says. In this instance, the property’s natural contours acted as a guide for both siting the house and laying out its floor plan. From the approach drive to the elevation, its presence appears to meld into the surroundings and point to the view of the Blue Ridge Mountains—as if you are immersed once you arrive. From a functional standpoint, it was also discreetly designed as a net-zero energy residence with an out-of-view adjacent solar field supplying their needs.

Playing to their love of entertaining as well as the desire for personal spaces where they could make memories with their three children, the interior is divided into two parts. “There’s a sinewy line that works its way through this house creating a nice interplay of formal rooms with more casual ones,” Chambers says, delineating the home’s bar as the crossover point between the ceremonial entry hall, living and dining rooms, and the relaxed family room, kitchen, and outdoor spaces. “At every level, the design was about thinking through how the family would live here, and the parents continually thought about this dream



Clockwise from top: An abundance of millwork defines the long formal living room, which is divided into cozy sitting areas thanks to a double-back sofa. The bar is a transition point from the home’s informal spaces to the more sophisticated, public ones, thus, the team wanted it to be a “jewel box,” Chambers says. During a trip to Rome, he became inspired by a wood-paneled vestibule in a church and brought the concept back to the team, who ran with it, adding a rich blue lacquer and standout light fixture. Traditional materials, including custom brick, slate, and copper comprise the exterior. Opposite: In the entry, a neutral palette, wood flooring laid in a herringbone pattern, and furnishings with a slightly modern flair hint at what’s to come throughout the rest of the home.



Clockwise from top left: The railing along the home's back staircase leads from the family room to a vestibule outside of a game room and wine cellar. Across from the stairwell, an entry door opens to the outdoor area. The covered porch extends across the back of the house and is accessible from a number of ground-floor areas, including the family room and formal living room. Opposite: In the home's more casual area, the family room sits opposite the kitchen. The mirror seen over the fireplace transforms into a television screen with the touch of a button, while laid-back furnishings and an earthy palette invite relaxation. Designed by Karen Turner Kitchen Design, the goal of the kitchen was to create a relaxed, welcoming space.





world for their children,” he adds, noting whimsical features like a slide from the top bunk bed, a secret attic space, and second-floor turret that doubles as a reading nook.

Elston took the same approach for furnishings and finishes. “I think my forte is listening and helping clients to create a home that reflects them,” she says. With the wife having previously worked in the fashion industry, polished, elegant designs were of interest in the living and dining rooms as well as the primary suite. “Everything is high style but still very comfortable,” Elston says, adding that the owners are very congenial and approachable, and the pieces needed to convey this.

As one walks through, fabrics, finishes, and architectural features signal the change from these formal to informal spaces. “There are so many details in this house that really create a beautiful aesthetic,” Elston says. For example, the dining room’s lightly hued wallpaper features peonies, the owner’s favorite flower, in an elevated and elegant way, while the living room’s profuse millwork gives the feel of what Birle calls an Art Deco Parisian apartment. In contrast, the everyday spaces are defined by reclaimed beams, exposed brick, and a warmer overall palette. “This is the more casual, working part of the home, and the house adjusts its concept to a come-on-in feel at this point,” Elston says, pointing to the family room. “It’s relaxed but still put together,” she says—a sentiment that seems to perfectly capture the homestead’s feel in whole.



Above: Thinking of their three children throughout the build, the owners had a custom bunk bed, complete with a slide, built for their son. “The house is really sort of a kid’s dream—both inside and outside—and that can be attributed to the clients,” Birle says. Below: Colorful slipper chairs and artwork of Biggie Smalls bring whimsy and personality to a guest room. Opposite: A turret that is equal parts cozy and chic became a dedicated reading nook for the children. Coming from the front entry, the second floor landing is a neutral, transition area that leads to the children’s spaces.



A custom Paul Montgomery hand-painted silk wallcovering featuring cumulus clouds and birds is nestled behind the bed, setting the tone for the main bedroom. "Because this is a private space in the floor plan, we had the opportunity to change the palette here and make it really velvety and warm," Elston says. An en suite bath as well as his-and-her dressing areas extend off the bedroom.



Located just off the family room and back stair hall, a spacious screened porch is a year-round hangout. Architect Blake Walker from the Dalgliesh Gilpin Paxton team was the project manager on the pool house, which features a full-service kitchen. "The intent was to relate this space to the main house but also make it a retreat," he says. To this point, a bluestone walkway extends from the house to the oval-shaped pool surround.

