



He Said, She Said For an Alabama couple who wanted both classic Southern taste and a contemporary look, designer Sean Anderson managed to strike the perfect balance.

by Gisela Williams. Photographs by Haris Kenjar

The living room's arched doors open directly to the pool area, which has Marin chaises by Kingsley Bate.

ALTHOUGH MISSISSIPPI-BORN and Memphis-based, the self-taught interior designer Sean Anderson has made a name for himself by tweaking the notions of old-fashioned Southern design. "What's so tricky when working with clients from the South is that they are so used to tried-and-true traditions," he explains. "I was born and raised here, so I understand that. Breaking that mold and reinventing new ways to envision that same vision, one that embraces warmth, family traditions, and gatherings of friends, is the key."

When Anderson was approached by Nancy and Mark Peebles two years ago to help design the interiors of their new-build property in Birmingham, Alabama, he knew he had to find a balance between Nancy's more modern ideas and Mark's inclination toward Southern old-guard style. Nancy imagined a contemporary low-slung Mediterranean house

with grand arched doors and a lot of light flooding in through floor-to-ceiling glass windows, but Mark, an avid outdoorsman, privately doubted that he would feel comfortable in a space that modern. He was used to their previous house, where they had lived for 20 years and raised their two daughters. Mark, a real estate developer, had even helped design the lodge-like property, complete with old hand-hewn hickory beams and a game room lined with his own hunting trophies. Anderson knew he would have

Right: The entry hall was painted using Benjamin Moore's Classic Grey in a satin finish; the Lychee Burl Stump table is by Blaxsand. *Below:* In the living room, a brass chandelier by Apparatus hangs above a sofa by Verellen.

to do a lot of listening (something he grew adept at during his years as a bartender). "For me, a project is not just about the visuals, but rather about an atmosphere," explains Anderson. The couple, who have a second home in Montana, did agree on one thing: They wanted to create that Big Sky Country feeling in their new house.

To that end, Anderson began to tweak the plans by architect Tom Adams of Alabama firm Defining Home to harmonize with his plans for the decor. "It's important to me that every space relates to the next one and that there is a natural flow," he says. Anderson pushed to redesign the entrance staircase so that it was a statement, adding an organic curve. He reconfigured what was supposed to be a screened-in porch into a sleek all-glass sunroom with a fireplace. In order to bring more of the outdoors in and add more rustic texture to the primarily open-plan white rooms on the ground floor, Anderson





Clockwise from left: The primary bedroom's bed, upholstered armchair, and benches were all custom-made by Grant Tick, and the curtains are by RH; interior designer Sean Anderson; the sunroom's vintage Oushak rug is from Eighteenth Street Orientals, and the custom curtains use Chivasso fabric.

had a wall in the kitchen and one in the living room surfaced with the same local river flagstone that was used on the exterior, and then whitewashed them. “For everything I incorporated in the house that reflected Nancy’s aesthetic, I found a counterbalance that matched Mark’s: a rough or rustic surface or a darker color,” Anderson says. The goal was to make it feel fresh enough for Nancy, but familiar and welcoming for Mark. In the open dining area, Anderson placed wooden spindled chairs by the British designer Matthew Hilton at both ends of the giant polished-concrete table, finishing it off with Verellen side chairs upholstered in an off-white textured fabric. The kitchen’s elegant marble island was surrounded by chic stools from Thomas Hayes Studio. “We entertain all the time, with children and dogs included, so I wanted surfaces to be low-maintenance and easy to clean,” says Nancy.

Early on, Mark had felt slightly snubbed when Anderson announced that much of their original furniture—mainly heavy, dark pieces—would most likely not move in with them to the new house. Still, Anderson made a point of filling each room with personal, eclectic details. Mark’s treasured moose head was mounted above the entrance staircase, so it would be the first thing to greet guests. In the living room, which has a pale wool-and-bamboo-silk rug and midcentury-looking wooden chairs, Anderson created a display of Mark’s vintage tramp boxes on an austere black coffee table. Outside the



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In the kitchen, the antique French lantern is from 1stDibs and the sconce at left is by Urban Electric. Below: The barstools are by Thomas Hayes with Holly Hunt fabric and Moore & Giles leather.

primary bedroom, Anderson hung a large-format photograph of their favorite view from the Montana house over a monumental white concrete console fashioned by a local maker, Michael Morris of Birmingham Concrete Design. “Sean really spent a lot of time understanding us,” says Nancy. “Even though almost everything in the house is new to us, there is a personal story behind it all.” The interior’s light fixtures, a clever mix of vintage modern chandeliers and unique oil-lantern-like sconces and pendant lights, successfully satisfied both Nancy’s preferences and Mark’s respect for the past.

“I get a sense of excitement when I can aesthetically convey something new and surprising by juxtaposing old and new and past and present,” says Anderson. As for Mark, he happily admits that his wife and the designer were right. “If it had been up to me I would have never left our old place,” he laughs. “And yet this house is above and beyond what I anticipated.”

