

United Front

Everything old is new again in
a contemporary Houston house
filled with treasured Spanish
and Italian antiques.

With a quartet of weatherproof wicker chairs gathered around a streamlined limestone fireplace, the loggia echoes the play between traditional and contemporary style carried out inside. Fragrant olive trees and a coffee table of cedar cubes confer Mediterranean ambience.



It's an old adage that successful

marriages require compromise. And designer Ginger Barber says that includes marriages of style. "Sometimes I think of myself as a furniture therapist," she says. "When a husband loves contemporary and his wife loves Spanish and Italian antiques, it's a balancing act to make sure they're both happy with their house."

And yet, Barber's familiarity with this particular husband and wife—a couple for whom she'd already designed three homes—made it easy for her to wed their divergent styles when they moved from a classic Mediterranean-style house to a home evincing the best of modern architecture. "I will always love antiques," she says, "but the older I get, the more I appreciate simplicity. So I'm able to understand and work with both decorative preferences."

A good thing, given the open floor plan, vast expanses of glass, and cool, glossy finishes that characterize her clients' new Houston home. Any one of these might have challenged a less open-minded

designer's ability to incorporate a collection of Mediterranean-style antiques her clients were unwilling to part with. Barber, however, welcomed the chance to balance old and new—and to warm the slick space. "Architecturally, the house is so clean it doesn't fight Spanish-style furnishings, or anything else," she says.

In other words, antiques fit in just fine. Still, Barber had plenty of shopping to do. "The goal was to reuse what they already owned, and then fill in the holes with contemporary rugs, modern art, and relaxed furnishings to emphasize the architecture," she says.

The result is an inspired juxtaposition of styles. The dining room, for example, is devoid of traditional embellishments, such as crown moldings, but it easily welcomed the owners' antique European sideboard, dining table, and chairs. The room's generous steel-clad windows and a wine room encased in glass provide a chic, gallerylike backdrop for the antiques. The living room also gave Barber a blank canvas, but this time she painted a modernized aesthetic. "The living room is all about the art," she says, calling attention to a trio of Robert Rauschenberg lithographs that practically float in the monochromatic space. "The furniture is all very unassuming so the art can shine."

Also unassuming is the home's quiet palette of neutral hues—another hallmark of interiors designed to both hush and highlight spare architectural features. "They're more like suggestions of color rather than actual color," Barber says. "We already had all these beautiful dark woods and creamy limestone floors. The house didn't need much more."

On the other hand, supplying texture was key. "A room just feels different when it's layered with texture," Barber says. "It doesn't matter whether it's a linen slipcover, a nubby sisal rug, or a tapestry hanging on the wall. If it adds texture, it helps a room come together." Especially when its occupants' tastes are far apart.



This photo: The entry hall, which brings together antique Italian terra-cotta urns and a 17th-century Flemish tapestry, displays designer Ginger Barber's facility for creating warmth through texture. **Opposite:** The work of residential designer Robert Dame, the home's front exterior straddles past and present in style. Though clad in time-honored stucco, it is spare and trim-free.



The dining room's architectural simplicity showcases a 12-foot-long monastery table and linen-upholstered dining chairs atop a casual jute wool rug. An Italian chandelier, crafted of iron and wood, illuminates the space. "The importance of texture is hard to describe, but the feeling it gives is unmistakable," Barber says.







Above: Richly veined white marble counters in the kitchen top a combination of stainless-steel and glossy laminate cabinets. Barber introduced texture and subtle old-world ambience with nailhead-studded, linen-upholstered wood barstools. **Opposite:** A wall of art and a muted geometric rug strike a modern note in the living room, which Barber relaxed with comfortable seating in tailored linen and velvet slipcovers.





“We didn’t try to add patina, only warmth.

The house is slick and new, and we went with it.”

—DESIGNER GINGER BARBER



Opposite: A niche in the living room provides a serendipitous home for a honey-hue, antique French walnut *bibliothèque*. A whitewashed Swedish coffee table and walnut armchairs adorned in tone-on-tone fabric exemplify Barber’s penchant for emphasizing pretty woods rather than pattern. **Left:** A vanity in the sleek master bath boasts a glass tile backsplash and a white statuary marble countertop. **Below:** Sumptuous and serene, the master bedroom features a custom leather tufted headboard, a zebra-print-wrapped Lucite-leg ottoman, and linen-slipcovered reading chairs.

