



At Home

Inspiring Your Home & Lifestyle™

IN ARKANSAS

family
HOMES
Make it pretty & practical!

OUTDOOR LIVING

CITY Oasis

A EUROPEAN-INSPIRED
POOLSIDE RETREAT OFFERS
A QUIET PLACE TO ESCAPE

STORY: STEPHANIE MAXWELL NEWTON
STYLING: LAUREN CERRATO
PHOTOGRAPHY: RETT PEEK



Arched windows and door frames, gas lanterns, and a pair of topiaries against the home's pale yellow and burnt green exterior set the tone for the home, which is in a secluded corner of the Heights neighborhood.



Melissa works with landscapers Ruth and Jamie Vasquez to find the perfect plantings at Good Earth Garden Center, like this yellow hibiscus.

GATHER TOGETHER

French doors from the kitchen open onto the loggia, which makes it a natural gathering place when Melissa and Walter entertain. "When you have a party, everyone wants to be in the kitchen. It's nice because it feels natural to drift out there as well," Melissa says. Another aspect that makes this space so appealing during parties is a TV hidden in the ceiling that can be lowered by remote control for partygoers to watch televised sporting events.

WHEN MELISSA HIXSON

and her now-husband, Walter, moved to Little Rock three years ago, it didn't take them long to find a house that felt just right. Having lived all over the country (most recently in Dallas), Melissa was happy and surprised to find a home in Arkansas that reminded her so much of some of her favorite travels abroad. "Our real estate agent showed us one house we thought we were interested in, but we didn't think it was the one," Melissa recalls. "Then he said, 'There's another I can show you, probably my favorite house in the Heights.' Twenty minutes later, we bought the house."

The home's pool and outdoor living area were what sealed the deal for the Hixsons. "It's got that kind of French feel, which is partly why we were so drawn to this house," Melissa says. "And we love that it's tucked away a little bit."

The space's focal point, a cozy loggia, has French doors leading to the living room, kitchen, and master bedroom, making it a perfect escape for coffee in the morning, a glass of wine as the sun sets, and everything in between. "We spend every chance we get out here," Melissa says. "It's our favorite part of the house."

WHEN SARAH AND RUSSELL BRANTLEY

bought their Heights cottage in 2008, they planned to be there seven to 10 years. However, as they began to get to know the neighborhood families and have children of their own, they became attached. "I was selling real estate for the Janet Jones Company at the time, so I was constantly in and out of houses all over the neighborhood: new, old, remodels, homes with additions, and I just kept falling more in love with our current house," Sarah says. Rather than moving to a new neighborhood, they decided to remedy their need for more space (they were expecting their second child at the time) with the addition of a second story as well as updates to the ground floor. Along with architect Carolyn Lindsey, designers and longtime family friends Christy Snowden Davis and Elaine Green contributed to the early stages of planning the renovation.



WORK MEETS PLAY

"I wanted a place that would work from toddler to teen," Sarah says of the downstairs playroom (pictured left), which is visible from the kitchen thanks to glass pocket doors. "This room functions exactly as I had hoped it would. It's a place for the children to play, color, and craft while I cook dinner nearby or work on the computer in that room." Sarah notes that the space is already starting to evolve. The couple's oldest daughter, Catherine Riley, started kindergarten last fall and has been using the area to complete homework.

However, over time Sarah developed a fondness for design and began to put her talents to work, selecting everything from paint colors and lighting to hardware and accessories for her family's new space. She enjoyed the process so much she founded S. Smith Brantley, a full-service design business, where she helps clients with renovations, additions, and style updates.

Today, you'll find the family of five (baby Helen was born in 2017) enjoying the view from their front porch, doing crafts in the playroom, or eating dinner out back—with the littlest ones seated inside the playhouse. "I always tell people that your house has to work for you; just because you see something on Pinterest or in a magazine doesn't mean it's going to work for you. It has to function," Sarah says. The renovation—along with Sarah's dose of tailored, personalized style—has done just that for the Brantleys.



The Brantleys called on architect Carolyn Lindsey of Ysary Lindsey Architects to help bring their vision of turning a one-story cottage into a two-story family home. "They brought me a picture of a front elevation they liked, and they even had a floor plan—this was very doable and realistic—roughed out," Carolyn recalls. "We went from there to help them get what they wanted and needed, and make the home look like it belongs in the neighborhood."



DINING IN

During the renovation, a wall in the kitchen was removed, extending the square footage of the room and creating space for a dining area. The table accommodates the family with a mix of Windsor dining chairs and upholstered ball-and-claw hostess seats, which is an unexpected combination of traditional styles.