

Perfecting the Past

Nearly 100 years into its history, a storied Atlanta residence is thoughtfully updated for clients with a flair for the contemporary.

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Architecture: Ili Hidalgo-Nilsson, Terracotta Design Build Co. Interior Design: Ili Hidalgo-Nilsson and Katelyn Rountree, Terracotta Design Build Co.
Home Builders: Maurie Hullender and Scott Madsen, Terracotta Design Build Co.

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ike many homes from the 1920s, a traditional brick abode in the historic Druid Hills area of Atlanta is replete with architectural charms: a wide front entry, limestone lintels, fanlights capping windows and a gracious porte cochere, among other

winsome hallmarks. Abutting Fernbank Forest, the enclave is beloved for its picturesque manses perched atop elegant landscapes—memorialized by cultural touchstones like *Driving Miss Daisy*—and a lush tree canopy laid out by landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted as devotedly as he crafted New York’s Central Park. Adding to that sense of legacy is the dwelling’s original architect, Leila Ross Wilburn, an early-20th-century trailblazer who was among Georgia’s first female architects.

Drawn to the lore of the neighborhood, the current owners acquired it with aims of preserving its history while mixing in their own modern style. For interior designer and architect Ili Hidalgo-Nilsson, working on a residence of such pedigree was a windfall of an opportunity. “The house had great bones,” says the architect, whose firm handled all aspects of the renovation, from delicate restoration work to decorative touches. “Working on a classic home that is part of Atlanta’s architectural history and evolution was exciting,” she adds. “Especially as a female architect, it was thrilling to collaborate with Leila Ross Wilburn through time and space.”

While a prior renovation a few years before had produced a primary suite addition, new steel windows on the back of the house and a full kitchen overhaul, it laid the groundwork for Hidalgo-Nilsson and her team to finesse things further. Spearheading the revamp was construction director and general contractor Maurie Hullender in collaboration with construction site manager and builder Scott Madsen, who dubbed the house “a treasure map waiting to be explored.” The scope of the duo’s work included preserving the brick archway leading to the primary suite, repairing existing interior doors—still boasting original unlacquered hardware—and rewiring the front entry for gaslit lanterns.

Taking her cues from inherited features like large arched windows, high ceilings and intricate moldings, designer Katelyn Rountree made it her

mission to inject the clients’ lively style in ways that would not compete with the old. “They’re a cool couple. Their style is a little bit rock ‘n’ roll, but also textural,” reveals Rountree, who leveraged the pair’s cache of travel mementos and contemporary art to create high-contrast focal points throughout the house. “Their collection had a very clear stylistic direction; it was bold, sculptural, not frilly in any sense.”

Setting the tone from the entryway, the designers chose not to compete with the original oak door, selecting a muted sage grass cloth for the walls and adding interest via patterned textiles, curved furniture silhouettes and a bentwood sculpture by New York artist Jeremy Holmes. This vignette also hints at surprises to come, such as the sinuous rattan piece over the living room fireplace. True to tradition, “We went a little dressy in this space,” Rountree says, “but it’s still approachable enough to host a fun cocktail hour.”

In another vintage throwback, Rountree focused on giving each room an individual mood by using a predominant color for each: There’s muted blush in a guest bathroom, a pop of golden yellow in the living room and slate blue in the kitchen. “The rooms really became capsules unto themselves,” explains Rountree, ever mindful to maintain a cohesive flow among the spaces. Her scheme extended even to graphite grays in the media room and dining room—where patterned tile floors complement the original French doors.

Elsewhere in the house, Hidalgo-Nilsson and her team added new thresholds. Steel-and-glass doors complement the existing metal windows, linking the kitchen and family room and leading the way to the pool terrace. “Their backyard was already gorgeous,” says Rountree. “Our updates were just about giving them a true sense of passage, and better connectivity between indoor and outdoor living.”

As a specialist in older homes that blend history with modern preferences, Hidalgo-Nilsson believes the clients were a perfect match for the residence for one key reason: They were inherently respectful of its past. “They trusted us to make every decision carefully, to highlight the proportions of the individual rooms and to preserve the home’s sense of history,” the architect explains. Because of this, “the house could live the way Wilburn intended, but also translate perfectly to today.” ■



For the living room of this Atlanta home, interior designer and architect Ili Hidalgo-Nilsson and her team placed Selamat’s cane Stockholm armchairs and a custom channel-tufted velvet sofa by Cococo Home. The latter’s goldenrod hue gives levity while capturing the owners’ “edgy style,” says designer Katelyn Rountree. Art Deco-inspired Downey Reflector sconces from Circa Lighting allude to the abode’s 1920s origins as a midcentury-inspired ceiling fixture by Stilnovo suspends overhead.



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Frequently playing host to lively cocktail hours, the living room features Serena & Lily’s Parisian bar cart beside a dining room door framed by a pair of Jean-Paul Parent prints. Matching ebonized ash table lamps by Rejuvenation converse with the glossy rattan sculpture, Reeve by Palecek, over the original limestone fireplace. Jim Thompson Fabrics’ diamond-patterned Hali textile covers custom accent pillows.



Above: Previously a sunporch, the dining room already boasted patterned encaustic tile floors and a vintage-inspired brass chandelier by Generation Lighting. The design team enhanced the space by way of Benjamin Moore's Mopboard Black and a marble-topped Stilnovo table surrounded by Four Hands cane chairs.

Opposite: The renovation swapped the kitchen's sizable island for an extendable ambrosia wood table crafted by Peter Erdei of Erdei Designs in Largo, Florida. Cabinetry dons Sherwin-Williams' Mount Etna to contrast existing honed White Macaubas quartzite countertops. Leading to the family room are steel-and-glass doors by Forge Fine Steel.



Left: Wainscoting in Sherwin-Williams' Pinky Beige sets the mood of this guest bathroom, which also wears a classic Zoffany grass cloth from Jerry Pair. Midcentury-inspired hardware on the marble-topped Yatesling vanity melds with Cedar & Moss pendants. Alternating striped brass-and-marble tiles from Floor & Decor extend underfoot.

Opposite: Continuing a motif seen throughout the residence, cane details on this guest bedroom's bed and desk chair, both by Industry West, pop against walls painted Sherwin-Williams' Cyberspace. Egg Collective's Carrara marble-topped Morrison bedside table for Design Within Reach takes on a tailored effect in tandem with crisp West Elm liners.



The backyard's stucco pavilion provides the clients a resort-like retreat at home. Beside the Roman-inspired limestone pool, teak sling chairs and outdoor floor pillows—all by Serena & Lily—compose a convivial scene between Grandin Road side tables. Slipcovered Lee Industries lounge chairs form an intimate conversation group on the covered porch beyond.

