



# TEXAS CHIC

*A tired two-story in  
Beaumont, Texas, becomes a  
modern marvel with help from  
a savvy designer and her team  
at M. James Design Group.*

TEXT ANDREA FANNING  
PHOTOGRAPHY MICHAEL HUNTER





As soon as Wes and Leigh-An Sonnier purchased a fixer-upper in one of Beaumont's established neighborhoods, they contacted designer Melinda James for help. Dark walls, dreary carpet, and tired wallpaper ran throughout most of the house, along with beige tile that did little to prevent the structure from falling into the "outdated" category. So James was tasked with bringing the interiors into the present day with fittings, fixtures, and finishes that would suit the young homeowners and their lively, posh preferences.

"The house had good bones," James says of the Sonniers' property. "Wes and Leigh-An were actually living in one of my previous client's homes when they purchased the Oakleigh house, and I had worked with them on their bedroom there. So we already knew we liked working together when we started this project." That established relationship gave the Sonnier family confidence in James's ability to work some of her trademark magic in their new abode. While James and her team from M. James Design Group began their transformation plans, the family stayed away and gave the designers full access—with the exception of one demo-driven moment. "Before we had really gotten started, I had a call from Leigh-An," James says



Previous pages: Nineteenth-century doors from Bourgoin Avignon, France—found at Houston's Chateau Domingue—lead the way into the entry hall, which features a mixed-metal staircase made by a local Texas artisan. These pages, opposite: "The room is not only beautiful to look at, it feels cozy and comfortable," says homeowner Leigh-An Sonnier of the living area. Above, left and right: The large entry-hall mirror was already in the family's collection. Designer Melinda James enlisted the help of a local artist to paint the frame on site.





"We are in love with the pecky cypress ceiling and spent many hours on its details during construction," says James. The living room also features carefully chosen accents that add curve and texture to the space, including an antique side chair in cotton velvet, Le Tigre pillows from Scalamandré, a Tibetan lamb throw, and a Lucite side table by Spectrum.



"IT'S VERY PERSONAL  
TO BE INVITED INTO  
A CLIENT'S HOME.  
I USE DESIGN TO  
EVOKE A MOOD  
THAT CAPTURES  
THE SPIRIT OF THE  
OWNERS AND  
THEIR HOME."

—MELINDA JAMES

In the dining room, hues both soft and bold combine for a modern spin on art deco décor. The Lillian August dining table sits atop a custom rug by French Accents. Crisp drapery panels are complemented by antique carved ebony-wood finials. A combination of leather and fabric turns classic dining chairs into conversation pieces. The featured artwork is dubbed "Weather Day 2014" and sets the mood for the space and, indeed, the entire home.





with a laugh. “She told me she had already torn down the wall of the existing laundry room and couldn’t wait to show me.”

More demolition followed as the team oversaw the removal of elements that brought down the aesthetic: Built-ins were torn out, along with cabinets, countertops, and more. Notes James, “We needed a clean canvas.” In conjunction with her daughter Ashley Crooks, her husband John James, and fellow designer Kelsey Rowe, James set out to “paint the mood of the home” and make the Sonniers’ design dreams come true. “We strive to capture the spirit of the clients. And the way we do things is basically a family thing,” says James. “Ashley graduated from Savannah College of Art and Design with a concentration in fashion and textiles, so she brings that kind of expertise—a more layered look—to our work. And my husband has an art degree. We love to collaborate!”

As they designed the rooms for this project, the team considered their clients’ love of entertaining.

“The Sonniers have excellent taste, so we tried to make everything feel a little bit indulgent, a little bit sensual,” James says. “But we didn’t want it to feel like you couldn’t touch anything. We went for European modern with comfortable accents.”

Just through the front door, the once-heavy entryway and hallway now open up into a clean pathway, giving a lovely view to the back of the home. James explains that the hallway originally had 16 electrical switches and now has only three to keep that area “clean and wide open.” To the left, the dining room contains a buffet that was already in the Sonniers’ possession, along with a Lillian August dining table, custom chairs, and French antiques. Modern art punctuates the looks throughout, and it was Crooks who curated and assembled the pieces to give them a collected-over-time effect. Says James, “Now Wes and Leigh-An can add to it and keep the collection going.”

In the living room, a custom ceiling designed by Kelsey Rowe was fashioned from pecky cypress



Opposite, top to bottom: Knocking down a utility wall allowed space for the new custom limestone fireplace in the keeping room. In the office, James and her team designed storage and surfaces that would work for a variety of tasks. Pale pink walls hint at a French accent, while slipcovered chairs keep the vibe casually elegant. This page, above: Two custom islands in the kitchen bring versatility and style to the space. The stationary one is topped with reclaimed wood, and the other has a marble overlay. The latter is on casters and can join with the first to form one large surface for prep or entertaining. Left: “We adore this cozy eating nook between the kitchen and keeping area. It overlooks the outdoor courtyard,” says James.



These pages: A sophisticated chevron pattern, installed by a local artist, graces the floors of the master bedroom and bath. Antiques and technology live side by side in the form of a French daybed and remote-controlled drapes. An oversized gilded mirror, billowy curtains, and a crystal-laden chandelier add to the romantic appeal of the bathroom.



wood salvaged from the bottom of a Louisiana riverbed. The overall impression is one of subtle grandeur, set off by a vintage Murano glass chandelier from Jean-Marc Fray in Austin. Restrained use of gilded and noir accents adds to the sophistication factor in this space, while Benjamin Moore's Gardenia from the Affinity palette brightens the walls.

Other improvements included a new light-and-airy gourmet kitchen that opens to an adjacent keeping room. In the guest bedroom, closets were combined and walls changed to create a larger bathroom and to provide a multipurpose room where Leigh-An could work, craft, wrap gifts, and more. "Kelsey drew up custom built-ins for that room, and we painted it a beautiful color from Benjamin Moore called Boudoir," explains James. "I'll never forget watching as Leigh-An walked into the living room for the first time and stood there for a while. Wes wrapped his arms around her and said, 'What are you thinking?' She was crying and said, 'My house is so beautiful. I just can't believe how beautiful it is!' And that makes it all worth it."