

Home Made Personal

Designer Melinda James thoughtfully updated this Texas cottage to be the perfect fit for one young family.





The partnership between designer Melinda James and the Martins began long before the renovation of the couple's cottage in Beaumont, Texas. As an electrician, Robert Martin has worked with Melinda for decades, so it was obvious who would be the perfect person to help them turn the space into a home they could truly call their own.

"The house had really good bones and framing, and we just made it theirs," Melinda says. Originally the personal home of a well-known builder, the house featured original elements that merited preservation,

like herringbone brick floors and exposed ceiling beams. To personalize it for the Martins, Melinda started with a fresh paint palette and a layout update that preserved designated rooms alongside an open gathering space.

Within the open living space, they arranged separate seating areas furnished with new pieces selected for both style and comfort. "I think we made it a little more fun and relaxed, but still pretty," Melinda says, noting she enjoys mixing materials and patterns to add "age, personality, and complexity."



Next to the window in the living area, designer Melinda James placed a long table that can be pulled away from the fireplace and added an oversize mirror and branches to fill the height.



The oak paneling that came with the home took on a coat of fresh paint, connecting the living area with the kitchen, which underwent a layout redesign. An open area left of the range hood now leads into the dining room via a walk-through pantry and service space, and new cabinetry and marble countertops “brought [the kitchen] up to date,” says Melinda.

The breakfast area off the kitchen features one of the few pieces the family brought with them into the home—a wooden table Katie and Robert Martin created themselves. “It was something they built when they first got together, so they wanted to keep it,” Melinda says. They paired the treasured piece with a few quirky stools painted white, and it’s become the favorite place for the couple’s two daughters to do homework and art projects.



*“I love to mix everything;
I don’t think anybody
[has] just one style.”*
—MELINDA JAMES




A priority throughout the design was new lighting, which in the kitchen meant adding stem lights among the newly re-stained ceiling beams. “I feel like lighting everywhere was very important, because [the home] didn’t have a lot,” Melinda says. She adds that the right light fixture can transform a room—which is certainly the case in the dining room, where a chandelier from Lowcountry Originals serves as a true centerpiece.

Below, a 72-inch round dining table fills the space, surrounded by chairs upholstered in a Lee Industries fabric. The scale of the checked pattern contrasts with the textured grass cloth on the walls, while casters on the chair legs provide ease of use—which is important, since the room is utilized often.



When it comes to relaxing after dinner, there's no shortage of cozy places to curl up and enjoy each other's company, including the "keeping room" that was nearly lost in the renovation. While Katie originally wanted to remove the walls and create a larger open layout, Melinda encouraged the preservation of an intimate space perfect for watching a little TV in the evening. "And that tray ceiling was there from the original builder, so we just painted it and found a good-style light to fit in there to make it fun," Melinda adds.

It's the perfect distillation of the design approach, which used a careful selection of stylishly comfortable furniture, showstopping light fixtures, and an appreciation of the home's existing charms to provide this family of four with a space that was truly made for them. 

TEXT BY BETHANY ADAMS
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHAEL HUNTER

The master bathroom underwent a few updates but maintained elements like the trio of stained-glass windows on one wall. "[Katie] wanted me to keep those," Melinda says, "and they were kind of in an odd spot, so we just played it up and put in the new tub."

