

In Good Taste



In collaboration with residential designers Robert Norris and Rick Spitzmiller, interior designer John Banks creates a timeless home that is the epitome of casual elegance

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Interior designer John Banks chose to display his collection of Chinese immortals on custom acrylic bases. The look is an effortless blend of old and new. Painting, Lagerquist Gallery, (404) 261-8273. // The living room, opposite shows John's deft hand at mixing various styles and periods of furniture to create one-of-a-kind interiors. Chair, Smith Grubbs & Associates, ADAC, (404) 219-9206. Sofa, Baker Knapp & Tubbs, ADAC, (404) 265-0501. Lamp, Regalo Antiques, ADAC, (404) 237-4999. Cocktail table, Grizzel & Mann, ADAC, (404) 263-6032. The screen was found on a shopping trip to Hong Kong.



An expanded window opening, fresh coat of paint and additional architectural detailing helped to brighten up a dark living room. Chairs, Baker, Knapp & Tubbs. Chair and window treatment fabric, Brunschwig & Fils, ADAC, (404) 261-5116. Antique English engravings, Avery Fine Art & Fine Frames, Miami Circle, (404) 266-8880.

EACH TIME INTERIOR DESIGNER JOHN BANKS has moved, he's spent no time second-guessing his decision. And his last move proved to be no different. It all started one day when John and his assistant were driving down one of those kind of leafy Buckhead streets that is more reminiscent of being in the middle of a North Georgia forest, and not a couple of blocks away from the hustle and bustle of Peachtree Road. Out of nowhere, in front of a low-slung ranch that John had driven by a million times, something caught his eye.

"I saw a For Sale sign and immediately called Glennis Beacham," says John, referring to one of the city's uber agents of real estate. "I wanted to see it in an hour."

In no time at all, John found himself in the house, but Beacham didn't get him far beyond the threshold before he had already made a decision. "I didn't even go upstairs," John says, "I just signed the contract."

While the process to renovate the house was not as quick and easy, John stuck to his original vision throughout. He called upon Robert Norris and Rick Spitzmiller of Spitzmiller & Norris, the noted Atlanta



The dining room features a custom-colored wallcovering from Brunswick & Fils that John had made specially for the space, Chandelier, Smith Grubbs & Associates. The mirror was found in an antiques shop in New Orleans. Table, Holland & Company, ADAC, (404) 233-2091. Rug, Persian Gallery, (404) 261-8888.



residential design firm, to help bring his ideas and the firm's own suggestions to fruition.

"We collaborate really well together," says John of the partnership. In fact, this is the third house on which they've worked together.

For starters, John wanted to brighten up the place. "I wanted more light in the living room," he says. The placement of a larger window in the room was just the beginning. Expanded window and door openings, and new flooring, ceilings, wainscoting and moulding throughout the house were key to the project's success.

A revamped front porch and new family room were two of the biggest structural changes. "This is a double-hearted house," says Spitzmiller of the spaces. The porch now serves as an extension of the house—it's an outdoor room of sorts that can easily handle the hordes of arrivals and departures at the events John hosts for various charities in town. "I've had up to 250 people here at once," he says. And with a reconfiguration of the back patio area, a new family room was able to replace an old solarium. The result is a dressy, yet casual home that flows seamlessly from one space to the next.

The look John has created is timeless and traditional, but don't expect to see anything stuffy or frilly.



Many of the pieces were brought over from his former residence, which was decidedly more formal. And amidst the comfortable seating are finds from his travels abroad, including Hong Kong and England, as well as modern artwork and his well-known collections.

"I like a mix of contemporary with traditional," says John. "It's not so expected."

Throughout the entire renovation process, John's resolve to stick to his plan and vision for the house was something Spitzmiller and Norris found reassuring. It is surely something the designer's own clients must also appreciate.

These days, the house that one sees while driving down that leafy Buckhead street is a place that is evocative of a retreat in the Blue Ridge Mountains. In fact, John calls it his "Highlands" house, referring to the similar style of homes found in the exclusive mountain hamlet in North Carolina—and befitting his forested surroundings in the heart of the city. No doubt, it's the reality of the vision that John had in his mind's eye several years ago when he first saw that For Sale sign.

"When I buy a house, I just have a gut feeling about it," John says.

The library features custom cabinetry, which John has filled with his expansive collection of Imari porcelain. Sofa and chairs, Travis & Company, ADAC, (404) 237-5079. Cocktail table, Webb-Marsteller, (404) 365-8161 ■ The family room, opposite, was reconfigured in an area formerly occupied by a solarium. Painting, O'Karma Gallery, (404) 874-9461. Chairs, Baker.



John Banks on his redesigned front porch (top). The home's façade (above) is befitting its rural-like surroundings. ■ Opposite, clockwise from top left: The family room, designed by Spitzmiller & Norris, replaced an old solarium. John has been collecting Russian lacquer boxes for 20 years. In the courtyard, he specifies an array of plantings for year-round interest. A grouping of walking sticks, one of John's many collections.

Timeless!

INTERIOR DESIGNER JOHN BANKS OFFERS UP THESE FIVE TIPS FOR CREATING CLASSIC STYLE

- Blend textures: suede, linen, leather and silk are superior options
- Balance the scale of fabrics in a room
- Incorporate your favorite collections
- Accessorize with antique leather books, bronzes and porcelains
- Mix contemporary artwork with classic design for an updated look

Design Details

INTERIOR DESIGN

John Banks, John S. Banks Interiors, Atlanta, (404) 266-0085

RESIDENTIAL DESIGN

Robert Norris and Rick Spitzmiller, Spitzmiller & Norris, Atlanta, (404) 843-3874

