

SOUTHERN STYLE

A designer with
an eye for high
style creates a
tailor-made home
for a young family.

by mary neff stewart
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Clean, crisp spaces with bespoke furnishings and a curated collection of art—these particular details were the requests from Katherine and JR Woodall concerning their new home. Fortunately, the couple knew just where to turn for these high-style inclinations. For their previous home, the Woodalls relied upon Rivers Spencer, a Jackson native and New Orleans-based interior designer to work her magic. The pair knew that it was her classic Southern style that they desired again.

Years ago, as she was polishing her design aesthetic, Rivers hung her shingle on Magazine Street in New Orleans to sell her finds—personally refinished antiques, unique accessories, and carefully selected works of art. The white, double-shotgun house showcasing Rivers' perfectly tailored style quickly became known as a destination for design lovers in the Crescent City. The studio became the headquarters for creating beautiful and livable spaces for her clients throughout the South.

As the Woodalls' family began to grow, the couple searched for the perfect nest in which to spread their wings. Initially settling on a beautiful expanse of land, they met with Rivers to begin developmental planning on a new build. Able to see and expand upon Katherine's vision, she helped to outline the establishment of their new home. When foundation issues and unforeseen problems brought the project to a screeching halt, the team regrouped and found a new suitable location. What resulted was better than any of them could imagine—a stunning renovation of a French chateau-style home in Montrose at the Country Club of Jackson, a quiet and secluded neighborhood ideal for the family and their lifestyle.

Even with a beautiful starting point to build upon, Rivers and Katherine knew there would have to be changes made to the layout to suit the couple and their three children. To begin, the pair updated the façade of the home with a new color palette and refreshed stucco. With the help of Roman O. Ingram, the refacing process was efficient and thorough. For the interiors, Katherine envisioned spaces that were welcoming and warm. Handing the reigns over to the designer, those dreams were realized. "The interior of the existing house was really beautiful and spacious, just heavy for Katherine's tastes," Rivers notes. With walls opened and spaces reconfigured, the designer created fresh spaces and vignettes. Each room has layers of textured fabrics, the rich woods of stunning antiques, and fabulous color in the form of perfectly curated works of original art.

The home blends family-friendly areas with ones created for entertaining. Open to the breakfast room and keeping room, the spacious kitchen is the best starting point for any festive event. Dark wood beams overhead warm the otherwise pristine white space while a matching pair of golden pendants adds sparkle. The movement to the dining room is flawless with light upholstery and drapery highlighting the dark traditional table and antique buffet. Deciding that covering the entire space may have been overwhelming, Rivers framed three panels of metallic Gracie wallpaper in narrow gold molding to bring textural elegance to the room. The two powder rooms also received an overhaul, with full coverings of beautiful Schumacher papers. In the small areas, the bold touch is exquisite.

Antiques and refashioned furnishings are sprinkled throughout the spaces, producing the finished look the couple desired. Most of the family's furnishings from their previous home were moved in and reworked in different areas.

The large Calacatta Borghini marble slabs in the kitchen bring a natural warmth to the space. Spencer utilized her personal lighting favorite, the Darlana lanterns by Circa Lighting, to bring sparkle to the space. An antique mirror and chest in the entryway bring rich tones to this vignette. Spencer commissioned New York illustrator Inslee Farris to create a series of watercolors featuring culinary items. The beautifully colored images bring a more casual feel to the setting.





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: The formal living room is a subtle, but comfortable, space. The pair of Kevin Gillentine landscapes bring an ethereal feel. The side tables were discovered at St. Martin's Gallery and the white chests are a creation in the Rivers Spencer Collection. The master retreat features luxurious Leontine Linens highlighted with crisp blue trim. The hue is repeated in the pair of Ralph Lauren blue and white lamps. The bed is from the Rivers Spencer for Tritter Feefer Collection. The Woodall's daughter's space is a beautifully sweet dream in light pink. Schumacher paper in Orpington Blue brings pattern and personality to a downstairs powder room. Marble and lucite pair perfectly for the custom vanity. A Neirmann Weeks chandelier sparkles above the dining table. The gold-framed panels of Gracie wallpaper are the ideal accompaniment to the space.

Rivers began her career refinishing pieces herself, but later had pieces custom-made by local New Orleans craftsmen and also through her eponymous collection with Tritter Feefer. With her own specialty finishes, these new pieces mix perfectly with ones sourced through her studio on Magazine Street and from antique shopping trips around the world. With Katherine's complete trust, Rivers chose collections of beautiful rugs, lighting, and accessories for the home.

Along with the unique furnishings in the home, Rivers gathered a collection of art that added personality and life to each room. "Every project is so much more enhanced by a curated collection of art," Rivers notes. "The art and the antiques are the strength of every space." From a custom collection of French-style watercolors by New York illustrator Inslee Farris in the breakfast room to a pair of ethereal Louisiana landscapes by her Magazine Street neighbor Kevin Gillentine, Rivers commissioned pieces that command presence in each setting. A mixed-media collage by Abby Price of Jackson rests above a pastel-hued abstract by Alexis Walter of New Orleans and creates a subtle vignette of calm color and texture. Finding that art can be one of the most personal things in the space, it was not surprising that JR had a strong opinion concerning one particular piece. "His one single request throughout the project was to have an Ashley Longshore piece in the collection!" laughed Rivers. One of Longshore's famed Audrey Hepburn portraits now hangs above the grand piano in the living room.

As in any of Rivers' projects, the resulting style of the Woodall home meets her goal of being "Southern and pretty" while loaded with tailored lines and fine finishes. She pulls inspiration from other strong Southern designers, as well as taking influence from her upbringing. "The way I watched the women in my life, my mother included, collect meaningful pieces and beautiful antiques for their homes, solidified my sense of place in my style," she notes. Producing her classic Mississippi style for clients all over the South and beyond, she truly makes coming home worthwhile for the Woodalls. M

rivers spencer

INTERIOR DESIGNER

interview by melanie m. ward

Growing up in Jackson, Spencer learned the elements of classic Southern design, which has served as her foundation in creating a timeless style. Her store, located in the famous design district on Magazine Street in New Orleans, is a jewel-box showroom featuring antiques, timeless and fresh pieces for any home, and the Rivers Spencer Collection, which she designs. Spencer's personal line is bench made and hand finished in New Orleans, while other pieces are crafted in Georgia through a partnership with Tritter Feefer Home Collection. When Spencer isn't working with clients, designing furniture, or traveling to source antiques, you will find her on the tennis court or at Audubon Park with her black lab, Zeus.

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PHOTO COURTESY OF RIVERS SPENCER

WHAT ARE YOUR FAVORITE PAINT COLORS AND WHY?

I use a lot of soft neutrals and varying shades of white to achieve a crisp and clean palette for my designs. I use mostly Benjamin Moore paints. My go-to white is Benjamin Moore "White Dove." I also have developed an affinity for Horizon, which has a soft blue undertone. For a nice grey my go to is "Classic Grey," which doesn't read too warm or too cool.

WHAT ARE YOUR FAVORITE ACCESSORIES AND WHY?

I tend to prefer a more curated collection of accessories, ranging from tabletop sculptures and wheel-spun artisan pottery to more fashion-forward items like AERIN accessories, such as her coffee table trays, which we carry in my store in New Orleans.

WHAT ARE YOUR FAVORITE DESIGN BOOKS/AUTHOR?

My design library is constantly growing, and I try to surround myself with books that can help build and inform my aesthetic. I have books by Nancy Corzine to Thomas Pheasant and Vicente Wolfe to Barry Dixon. Inspiration from other designers, especially those whose style differs from your own, can help enrich the design process.

WHO ARE THE OTHER DESIGNERS THAT YOU ADMIRE/WHOSE WORK YOU APPRECIATE?

My biggest influence would have to be Suzanne Kasler. My other design heroes include Jan Showers and Phoebe Howard. My taste is firmly Southern, and I hope my designs impart a strong sense of place and history with an infusion of freshness and glamor.

WHAT ARE YOUR GREATEST SOURCES OF INSPIRATION?

You never know when inspiration will strike. When designing for my furniture collections, I often research antiques and old furniture books and encyclopedias. New Orleans itself, with its unique architectural point of view, probably serves as my biggest source of inspiration.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE WAY TO FRESHEN/UPDATE A ROOM?

Tailored, fresh and properly made drapery can do so much for a room. I often tell my clients to start there.

WHAT IS THE ONE PIECE IN YOUR HOME YOU JUST COULDN'T LIVE WITHOUT?

I have a massive Kevin Gillentine painting above my sofa in my living room that I will forever cherish. The runner-up would probably be my Schumacher wallpaper that's in my guest bedroom.