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ENDURING SOUTHERN HOMES ROSS



ENDURING *Southern* HOMES

ERIC ROSS
PHOTOGRAPHS BY EVIN KREHBIEL

ENDURING *Southern* HOMES

With a background in custom furnishings and a penchant for traditional fabrics and antiques, Eric Ross creates dynamic home interiors that blend comfortable Southern living with timeless style.

Enter a world of interiors steeped in the heritage and romance of the South. Within these pages are stories of a dozen homes that reveal a rich layering of fabrics, wallpapers, rugs, antiques, and furnishings combined in a refined Southern aesthetic. Blue-and-white porcelain, mixing fabrics on furniture, statement print curtains, artistic wall groupings and tasteful displays of homeowners' personal collectibles star among Ross's signature look.

From antebellum, colonial and estate residences to new-build family homes and condominiums, Eric enlivens spaces that could be otherwise non-descript. He works magic blending his clients' well-loved furniture pieces with exquisite fabric combinations and pulls beloved treasures from family attics for new groupings on tables and walls. The styles of these homes run the gamut from French and equestrian with a Southern touch to modern farmhouse.

Design tips offer insightful takeaways for anyone wanting to fashion a room for enduring style to last through phases of life and through changing trends.



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Chapter One

ANTEBELLUM JEWEL

A client and her husband had bought an antebellum property well south of Nashville and had been renovating it for over two years. She was exhausted from the countless decisions they'd had to make over the previous years and just couldn't face making any more. She knew that the decorating would make or break the entire project, so she called to ask if I would help her. I immediately said, "Yes!" After all, it is a jewel in every interior designer's crown to decorate a Southern antebellum mansion. I was eager to help and honored to be asked.

I started with a couple of rooms instead of the whole house. This allowed less commitment from the client emotionally and financially in the beginning and gave us more time to get to know each other. I quickly pulled together a preliminary look, or "mood," for the project and presented it in one room rather than the entire house—which can take months. The client saw that I was achieving her desired look in one or two rooms, which enabled a faster completion of the whole house project in the long run.

The first phase of this project included the living and dining rooms, with the foyer thrown in as

a bonus. Even though most foyers are small, they are mighty because they set the tone for the entire look of a home. Here I introduce the colors and themes of the home in microcosm. My inspiration for the foyer in this project came directly from the couple who hired me and from the home's grandeur and sublime setting. The clients were affable and chic, with a penchant for entertaining large groups of friends and colleagues. I wanted to create rooms that were as easygoing and elegant as they were.

The home and its surrounding farm were incredibly romantic. The gate to the property was quite grand, and an allée of trees ended at a round motor court. The architecture of the house was Italianate with farm-style touches, such as a red, standing-seam roof. Barns and rolling hills created a stunning backdrop, yet acted as a counterpoint to the formality of the house itself. This casual elegance was an overarching theme I wanted to communicate through the colors and furnishings.

I decided on a subtle faux finish for the walls in the grand foyer, as I felt a simple coat of paint would feel too new and inauthentic in this environment because of the history and style of the home.



Because all the client's immediate family lived nearby, she didn't need to use the duplex's three bedrooms as guest rooms. So I decided to outfit the front bedroom—directly off the foyer and living room—as a library for part of her large collection of books. While increasing door heights in this room, I also increased the width of the opening with a pair of eighteen-inch French doors.



PREVIOUS OVERLEAF: A small sofa flanked by two bookcases in the living room creates an intimate seating area in the large room. **OPPOSITE:** A handsome sitting area next to the bookshelves across from the desk is a good place for conversation or quiet reading.

The study is almost always an opportunity to create a visual counterpoint to the formality that I generally imbue in foyers and living spaces. I like the effect of using the same color on walls and trim, especially a dark color.

For this client, I went with a moody, bluegrass green on all the trim and walls. It generates a feeling of richness—almost of velvet—and imparts a sense of heaviness—a masculine touch. I used the dark matching color on all the bookcases as well.

In an unusual exception, I opted for two-inch mahogany wood blinds instead of fabric window treatments in order to give the room a vintage feel. I also placed a mahogany desk and chair in front of one wall of bookshelves. The red tone of the wood against the juniper-like green casework produces a rich, dynamic look.

Just one, William Morris-inspired, printed fabric was used in the room, coupled with leather, to finish off the look. Instead of a traditional antique Persian rug, which I always love, I chose a blond antelope. It injects a fresh, younger look so the room feels like a historic interpretation rather than a literal reproduction.





A stone-clad inglenook was designed to house a buttercream, enameled AGA range. This created a romantic story that the space was once the cooking fireplace, where iron kettles hung from forged-iron swing arm hooks. We applied a brick facade on either side of the range nook, which makes it appear as if this wall was the exposed brick from the outside wall, creating a more casual and humble feel to the kitchen and dining room areas. My client was at first hesitant to use so many materials, but she was won over when she saw all the finishes installed together with the wallcovering and other fabrics.

For this project, I had originally envisioned a

farmstead overlooking the Hudson River in New York. For my first round of selections, I chose soft blues, quiet celadon greens and terra-cottas for the fabrics and wallcoverings. After presenting them to the client, she said, “Eric, these are all very pretty and I know it would be lovely when you finished the home, but I really want something brighter and more casual.” I quipped, “This farmhouse isn’t in Kansas.” To which she replied, “My grandmother was from Kansas.” Unfazed, I quickly said, “Well, let’s do a Kansas farmhouse then.” And we completely upped the color volume and turned down the formality.



The great room is a vast two stories. I decided on a dark taupe color for most of the large public rooms so they felt more intimate and not imposing. The furnishings in the great room were selected with comfort and style in mind. A large sectional with a chaise on one end is situated in front of the stone fireplace, which also houses the TV. This arrangement is necessary for a room that works for young children and their insatiable appetite for cartoons, as well as for hosting sports viewing parties.

We added an upholstered ottoman as a cocktail table, covered in a tapestry reminiscent of an Oriental rug, and layered it on a bound broadloom area rug. (This is a trick I use a lot for young families on a budget to give the effect of—rather than spending a fortune on—a large Oriental-style rug.) The seating area is rounded out with a pair of club chairs in a geometric velvet and small armchairs we re-covered to fit the scheme, another gift from my niece's grandmother.





Our daughter, Julianne, and I worked together to decorate her bedroom, which was a unique experience. It needed to reflect her teen style and also be something I would enjoy looking at. She developed a mood board of looks she liked, and she really wanted navy and coral. I love coral as well and was happily surprised at her choice.

To accent a navy bedspread, I found a small-scale print in coral, cream and navy for the curtains and dust ruffle. A navy and white rug made the room feel youthful, and a bold stripe created a strong accent wall behind the bed, giving the room energy and panache. Julianne and I were both very pleased with the result.

LEFT: This is the brightest room in the house and we love it! The love seat we slipcovered is from Julianne's great-grandparents. We reused the desk and bedside tables from her previous room and painted the drawer fronts to coordinate.



For the husband's study, a grainless wall-covering in a warm shade of celadon peppered with brown speckles gave even more subtle texture and was perfectly partnered with a dark brown printed fabric that made the overall feel more masculine. I liked the counterintuitive concept of using celadon, usually thought of as a feminine color, in a man's office. The menswear effect of the pinstripe on the drapes also helped achieve another layer of masculinity.

We reused the client's existing cognac leather club chairs, but I re-covered the seat cushions in the same printed fabric as the window treatment cornice. I added a freestanding bookcase in black to give more visual weight and sobriety to the light walls. Cobalt blue accents in lamps and objects d'art contributed a lively effect.

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ERIC ROSS has lived and breathed traditional living since he was a child. He is a seasoned interior designer with over twenty years of design experience. His work has been published in *Traditional Home*, *Southern Style*, *Southern Lady*, *The Cottage Journal* and many other publications, and his passion is to fan the flame of traditional decorating with a deeply Southern aesthetic. He lives in Nashville, Tennessee, with his wife, Ruthann, daughter, Julianne, and Cavalier King Charles spaniels, Prince Darby and Dixie. Follow him at ericrossinteriors.com.

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The icing on the cake with this project was that it was redesigned to be ready in time for the clients' daughter's pending nuptials. While it wasn't the setting for the wedding, the family would be welcoming many out-of-town relatives and friends, using the home as a backdrop to the festivities. The owners were thrilled that visitors commented on how the home looked updated while also reflecting the personal style and taste of the client. It was rewarding to see how thankful the couple was that we had used so many of their family pieces. The fresh, updated rooms made the clients and their newly extended family excited to start the next chapter in their lives together.



Worth Noting

- Keep in mind that the foyer sets the tone of your house. Think of it as a prelude or overture, giving hints of what's to come. Try to repeat colors from other rooms in a rug, fabric or wallcovering as linking elements to create unity and balance in the home's decor.
- While we often hear that lighter paint colors make a room feel larger, sometimes dark colors can work, for other reasons. If you get a lot of sunlight in a room, a dark wall will help absorb the light and reduce glare. This is particularly effective in rooms where items seem backlit by the sun. By reducing glare, items in the room are more noticeable and the room is easier on the eyes.

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