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Homes & Gardens



a writer's

STYLE

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An interior designer and an architect worked together to create a new story for the home of an Atlanta novelist. It's a tale worth telling.

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The elegant homes of Buckhead, Atlanta's most exclusive residential enclave, are surrounded by the verdant nature of its historic nineteenth-century past. Amid the rolling hills, leafy forests, immaculate emerald lawns, and venerable oaks, hickories, and magnolias, there is an abundance of architectural styles — Greek and Georgian Revival, neo-Palladian, Baroque, Federal, Normandy, American Colonial—that make these homes highly coveted.

The *New York Times* bestselling author Emily Giffin, whose novels have sold millions of copies worldwide, and her investment banker husband, Buddy Blaha, joined interior designer Beth Webb and architect Stan Dixon when searching for their new home in Atlanta. The couple was looking for charm, history, and an ample backyard for their three young children — twin sons and a daughter.

When they discovered this five-acre Buckhead property, centered on a Georgian Revival house designed in the 1920s by one of America's finest classical architects, Atlanta native Philip Trammell Shutze, everything clicked. Or almost everything. The legacy of a previous renovation was

more evocative of a traditional English country manor than the modern mix of antiques and contemporary art that characterized the lifestyle of the family. "We wanted the house to feel warm, relaxed, and inviting, a comfortable backdrop. And we wanted to use every room," says Giffin.

"Our mantra was to make it lighter, fresher, happier — to give it what I call a blond palette — and turn it into something that was theirs," explains Webb. For Dixon, who has won awards named for Shutze from the Southeast Chapter of Classical Architecture and Art, the inspiration was obvious. "The original house was beautiful. The previous renovation had added some nice spaces on the ground floor, the master bedroom suite, a family and a breakfast room, but it was a bit traditional, and the aesthetic didn't work for Emily and Buddy," Dixon confides. "I wanted to peel back and showcase the original architecture."

To the delight of the owners, Dixon tracked down Shutze's original plans to guide them in maintaining a 1920s sensibility. Dixon, who specializes in both Southern and European-inspired classical and traditional residential architecture, took charge to freshen up and repaint inside and out. The Georgian Revival-style lime-wash exterior received a fresh coat. "This finish has a white cast that evolves over time. It gives the house a sense of age and patina that makes it warm and inviting," Dixon notes.

Opening pages: Author Emily Giffin writes her novels in a home office in Atlanta. Left: A Jean de Mery commode occupies the foyer, above which hang drawings by Udo Noger.



Benjamin Moore's Clinton Brown is used on the dining room walls. Georgia artist Thomas Swanston's *Spring Sojourn* (right) fills a wall. An antique crystal chandelier hangs above the volute dining table by Therien Studio Workshops. The chairs are custom by Alison Spear. Connemara gilt curtains by GP&J Baker from Lee Jofa frame the windows. The wool and silk rug is Holland and Sherry.

Once through the front door, the stunning black-and-white modernity of the foyer is as redolent of the 1920s as it is a vignette of twenty-first-century elegance. In star position: a Jean de Merry chest of drawers with a high-gloss black-lacquered walnut-veneer wood finish, a furniture equivalent of a little black dress by Chanel. As Webb says, "It's couture."



midnight, she would hit the Internet. "Emily would be shopping the world at 3 a.m.," Webb reports. "That is when she had time to do it. Later, I would walk in with a stack of her tear sheets and we would discuss what worked best for the space. It gave a very busy owner the opportunity to participate. She was very definitive about what she loved."

Throughout, rooms with white walls and doors now highlight the restored architectural details, including transoms, moldings, and millwork. In the living room, light streams in and bounces off the muted palette of caramel, cognac, taupe, and pale gray. Contemporary drawings and abstract art cover the walls. "We truly do use every room on a near daily basis, including the more formal spaces," Giffin points out. "Our children take piano and guitar lessons in the living room." They've also been known to play ball in the foyer. Fortunately, the Tai Ping rug has held up well."

Dramatic chocolate brown walls, an antique crystal chandelier, and an arresting acrylic and silver-leaf painting of migrating birds by Georgia artist Thomas Swanston in the dining room are exceptions to the white wall décor. "We often have casual meals in the dining room," Giffin says. "The small scale is cozy, surprising for a Georgian-style home, and doesn't overwhelm our family of five."

To keep Giffin involved, who was in the finishing phases of a novel, designer and client developed a "customized" collaboration. "I love shopping for art and antiques. They make a house a home by giving character and originality," Giffin considers. So, post-

In a major makeover, Dixon replaced the kitchen's dark cabinetry with open white shelving and white cabinets, redesigned the range hood, created a central island and covered the wall with porcelain subway tiles to give it a 1920s look. Counter and island tops are Calacatta gold marble illuminated by deco milk-glass pendants, while the wooden floor is painted white with geometric black lines.

The walls of the ethereal master bedroom are painted a chameleon white shade that offers blue, green, or pure white tones with the changing light — hues apparent, too, in the garden, visible through the windows. Meanwhile, the ceiling has been lime-washed to foster a cloudy up-lighted vista.

The garden, structured Atlanta-style in clipped boxwood, is abloom with gardenias and hydrangeas planted around a central fountain. It is also home to another surprising residence: the chicken coop abode of a free-range rooster and his flock of hens and chicks that are the family's pets, a countrified touch.

Recognizing that he and Webb were the right, restrained match for the project, Dixon observes, "With Emily and Buddy's taste, and our joint vision, we were able to pull back and edit so the house could shine." It gleams. ■



Left: On the mantel, a graphite sketch by Kimo Minton and Auguste Garuffi's *Seated Figure* flank Picasso's *Pour le Robbe*. The gilded tones of an Avrett cocktail table are echoed in the cognac-hued, silk and cotton upholstery on the Helene Aumont Collection's slipper chair. Above: Peter Foley's *Untitled 1, 2, 4 and 5* line drawings are positioned above a sofa covered in a Pindler & Pindler silk. The coffee table, one of a pair, is circa 1930. The silk and wool carpet is by Tai Ping.



Architect Stan Dixon designed the kitchen's open shelving and cabinetry. The island is clad in Calacatta gold and white marble. Edward Ferrell + Lewis Mittman Metropolitan bar stools covered in Glant's sand patent leather are grouped around the island; 1930s white milk-glass pendants hang above. The nickel silver faucet is by Michael Smith for Kallista.



In the master bedroom, the bed is covered with Leontine Linens. Linen curtains are Pindler & Pindler. A leather tufted bench at the foot of the bed is by Thomas O'Brien for Hickory Chair Company. Situated within the bay windows is a pair of chairs in Rose Tarlow linen and silk fabric. One of a pair of Swank Lighting hand-blown glass lamps by Joe Cariati is on the bedside table. Benjamin Moore's Healing Aloe casts a glow of off-white, green, or blue with the room's changing light.



Atlanta-based landscape architect Tadd Thomas was responsible for much of the design of the property's garden. Clipped boxwood hedges are punctuated by round boxwood balls. The garden's fountain centerpiece also is flanked by boxwood adorned with roses. An arbor leads like an open gateway to other reaches of the garden, including a horse barn, pond, and chicken coop that houses the family's pet flock of roosters, hens, and chicks.