



## Third Time's the Charm

One couple's dread in the face of yet another renovation turned to delight thanks to a team of seasoned design professionals.

The Worleys have a thing for 1930s homes. So much so that when careers led them to leave their 1935 house in Nashville, Tennessee, and put down new roots in Birmingham, Alabama, the family fell quickly for a 1938 cottage in a cozy suburb of town. What wasn't as delightful was embarking on another renovation, this being their third.

"We love knowing that a home has history to it," says Gabrielle Worley, who adds that, while previous owners changed the house to make it work for them, doing so made it feel disconnected. To remedy that, the Worleys chose the design-build firm of River Brook Design & Construction, whose co-owner, Leigh Misso, would lead their project.

"We started at the drawing board of 'how can we configure the spaces to feel all original and family-friendly?'" recalls Leigh, whose solution swapped the levels of the primary suite and children's rooms as well as the locations of the kitchen and family room. This maximized storage and light and created a more natural flow.





Beyond construction, color can be credited with the visual impact of the cottage. “Leigh helped push me out of the neutral box,” says Gabrielle. “She’d say, ‘This is something that’s classic and will age well.’”

Leigh integrated shades of blue throughout the home, going richer in the dining room and then continuing the palette to the living room sofa and even the front door. “Color is back in full swing, and when I proposed the Farrow & Ball cabinetry color [for the kitchen], I knew it could pull blue, green, even a little teal,” Leigh says.

In the kitchen, the design team thoughtfully balanced cottage charm and sophisticated elegance. The grandeur of a waterfall island is only eclipsed by the striking statement light fixture. “When we looked at Gabrielle’s inspiration images, her aesthetic leaned more modern, so we wanted to give her something that felt cutting-edge,” Leigh says. “Traditionally, we’d hang separate pendants above the island, but you’re seeing more unit and linear fixtures these days—and we knew this was the place to place the envelope.”




With the swapped placement of the kitchen, it wasn't an option to have a window over the sink. Rather, a custom art piece became a welcome—and wipeable—feast for the eyes during daily dishwashing. (Opposite) The backsplash behind the range is an antique panel mirror. "It's durable. If anything spills or splatters while you're cooking you can easily clean it, but it also adds the patina that you'd get with an antique," Leigh says.





From there, the home's seamless merger of contemporary and traditional is apparent in the primary suite, a long and narrow space formed by joining two secondary bedrooms. Dodging window placements, Leigh placed the bed in the back and added dramatic dimension by draping the wall and running it around the adjacent exterior side. "It instantly felt custom, cozy, and warm," she recalls. Existing bedding, a rich green velvet headboard, and antique chairs completed the serene retreat.

"We've renovated three times and used three different teams," says Gabrielle. "Working with River Brook made me not terrified to do it all again." Of course, with a space as suited to their style as this one, it's more likely the family will call this cottage home sweet home for years to come. 

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(Opposite, bottom left) The primary bathroom features a matching pair of 19th-century Louis Philippe mirrors that Leigh found at market. "They were silvered and stunning and such a perfect pair," she says.