



Cottage luxe

By Laurie Prince Photographs by Stacey Haines

An interior designer tackles a Myers Park redo with charming results

THIS PAGE: Designer Heather Smith enlisted the help of architect Ruard Veltman to renovate and rework her 1940s brick cottage. OPPOSITE: Bucking tradition, Smith and Veltman opted to create a large family room on the second floor of the 3,300-square-foot home. The space boasts large sofas and chaises and wide dormers, which add a romantic sense of privacy.

CHRIS EDWARDS (2)





Five-year-old Whit's bathroom boasts an antique table that Smith recreated and transformed into the oversize vanity with marble top. Smith found the goose at a Paris flea market. "Whit was obsessed with a group of books about Gossie, the gosling, and I thought he would love to have his own Gossie in his bathroom!"

A heavy front door swings open

FROM TOP LEFT: Each of the living room's four wall sconces has four gilded arms; at night the effect is like candlelight. The master bedroom is an extension of the living areas of the home in terms of design and color scheme. The hues shift but remain analogous from one room to the next.

and there stands Heather Smith, the thirty-two-year-old designer from Circa Interiors and Antiques, in a dusty rose dress overlaid with gray organdy and belted at the waist. Married to Chad—who is the son of Circa owner/interior designer Cindy Smith—she wears her glossy brown hair swept up in a clip; a few loose tendrils frame her pretty face. Nearby is three-year-old Wansley; five-year-old Whit is upstairs taking a nap. As she pads around barefoot on jute floor coverings—"it's kind of like denim, the more you use it, the softer it is"—she's a charming snapshot of her design style: the artful use of luxury to create comfort.

It's an approach that has enchanted clients, especially a growing cadre of NASCAR celebs that

includes championship driver Jimmie Johnson. "I did their house—that took about two years," she says, explaining that she started shortly after Whit was born. That project led to more work for the Johnsons—a motor coach, plane, New York apartment, nursery, and even a fundraising party. "I got really lucky," she says, laughing, with modest Southern grace.

But her talent is bigger than luck, evidenced by the details, atmosphere, and imaginative reordering of the 1940s brick cottage she and Chad renovated in Myers Park. With the help of architect Ruard Veltman, the modest 3,300-square-foot home was expanded by a third to give it a master bedroom downstairs and a spacious family room on the second floor, suitable for entertaining. The small kitchen at the front of the house, which



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Smith designed three-year-old Wansley's bedroom with whimsical, romantic touches including her Christening gown, ballerina tutus, and Teddy bears. "I designed the room around the wallpaper because I loved it so much," says Smith. "I thought it could be perfect for a girl or boy or later as a guest room."



functioned like a tailgate prep area, was welcomed into the downstairs as part of the living space, Veltman explains.

"We set out to create a beautiful room, to treat everything in the kitchen as furniture," he says. "Literally, you should be able to move that kitchen around." Layers of textures frame the room to create a lived-in feel: a glazed linen drape closes off the pantry, raffia shades keep the windows light. The tiny kitchen is so seamlessly incorporated into the dining area and a sitting room that it disappears into the larger context.

When asked to name the colors throughout the house—greens that are gold, golds that are brown, browns that are gray—Smith offers a down-home definition. "I call them icky colors," she says with a smile. Like a pond under a cloudy sky, the hues shift but remain analogous from one room to the next. It's an impressionable palette; there is just enough of any one color in the mix to give a room what it needs. For example, the kitchen color—painted ceiling to floor, including crown moldings and baseboards—causes the crystal decanters to sparkle. "If you've got a little bit of everything in it, it always works, no matter what," she says.

Throughout the interiors, chandeliers and wall sconces illuminate the home's subdued palette. "I think a lot about lighting—I almost think about it like it's a color. Lighting transforms a room—whether it's a lot of light or a little light," Smith notes. The living room's four wall sconces were a house-warming gift from Cindy Smith. Each sconce has four gilded arms; at night the effect is like candlelight. European antiques, luxurious drapes, architectural fragments, and rough stone counters press an imaginary history into the home that is enhanced by Smith's skillful lighting design.

Upstairs is the home's most inventive use of space: an airy living room. There wasn't room for it downstairs, so the Smiths went up—an unconventional concept. Now they have room to entertain: seating areas have large sofas and dreamy chaises, and wide dormers add a romantic sense of privacy. To keep the room from feeling closed in, a balcony was added with steps leading to



Most of the home's original footprint was left untouched but Veltman did rework the staircase—"it was facing the wrong way," he says—which leads to the upstairs family room. Smith and mother in law Cindy found the shelves in Paris.

Smith chose a cleft face Bluestone for the counters. "When we work with dark interiors we like to use a countertop material that really pops," says Veltman. "But Heather's idea of using a dark material was even better because it blends so well with the interior."



the back lawn. "Typically that space in a house is a play room, a dead end," says Veltman. "The French doors and porch create an outlet—they allow you to feel you're part of the rest of the house." The porch is constructed around a tree, seen through the French doors. "Ruard and I started thinking of it as almost like a tree house," says Smith. It's a private retreat, a party room, a playroom for children.

When asked to name her favorite things in the house, Smith hesitates. The challenges of being a designer suddenly surface. "I don't get emotionally tied to things because I'm always seeing something else," she says. Her detachment is, perhaps, what makes her so good at what she does, proving an asset when she switched from a psychology major to earn a degree in interior design. Objects in a room are merely that: things that are used to achieve a final result. "It's a feeling, an emotion you create," she says, "not one piece of furniture." 

The renovation was a wonderful collaboration between an architect and a designer, says Veltman. "We treated everything like a piece of furniture including the kitchen island and range," says Veltman. "We decorated our way out of a bad space and Heather ran with it."

Laurie Prince is a frequent contributor to this magazine. She last wrote about a Charlotte resident's home in Aiken, South Carolina.