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House Beautiful

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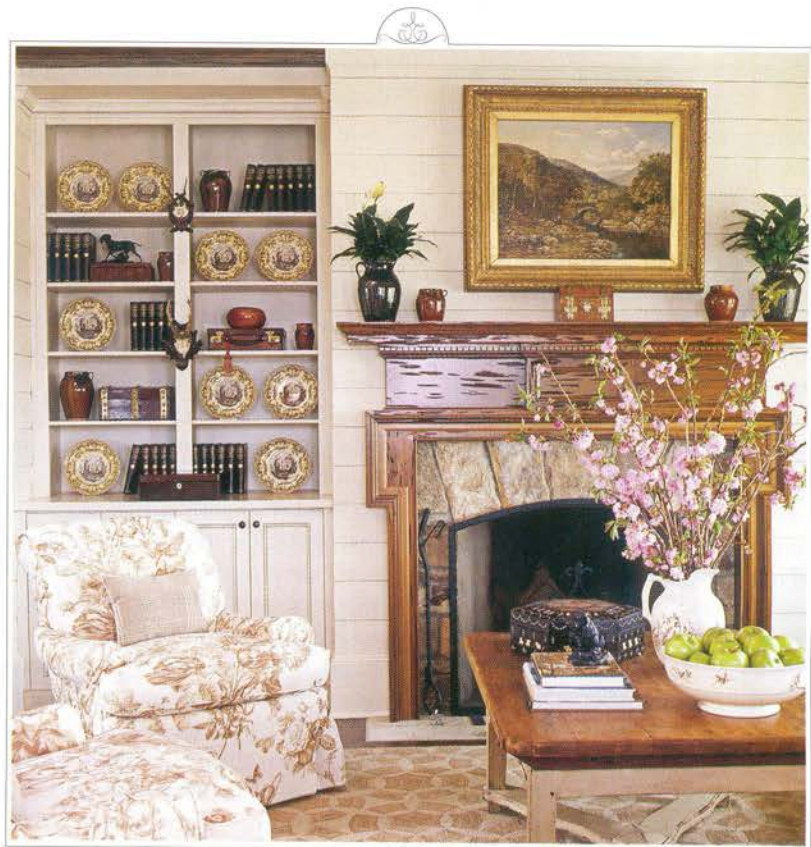
New
TRADITIONS



Interior design by PHOEBE HOWARD

Interview by FRED ALBERT

Photographs by LUKE WHITE



Soft & Pretty

In **CASHIERS, NC**

A WOODSY MOUNTAIN HOUSE WITH FEMININE GRACE

LEFT: Beamed ceilings and shiplap walls lend a sense of history to the living room of the new house, while earthy neutrals and updated versions of florals and checks give it a fresh, more modern feel. Chairs are covered in a Grey Watkins linen, Aurora Bella; curtains are Hodson McKenzie's Albemarle Check. ABOVE: The beautifully burnished mantelpiece wood is pecky cypress, which was also used for the beams.

FRED ALBERT: Here we are in a mountain house in North Carolina, and there's not an antler chandelier, buffalo check, or twig chair in sight.

PHOEBE HOWARD: My clients didn't want typical mountain-themed furniture and fabrics. They wanted it to be warm and to incorporate a lot of wood and nice antiques. The wife asked for a lighter, airier, prettier mountain house, one that would be slightly feminine. She has a lovely soft-spoken graciousness about her, combined with an old-fashioned sensibility, and the house is a reflection of that.

You've made old-fashioned look so new. How do you pull that off?

It's edited. If you notice, there are only three or four colors in each room. By limiting the palette, it really gives it a more cleaned-up look. The walls and the trim downstairs are all painted the same creamy color, Benjamin Moore's Winter Wheat, so that keeps the place visually cohesive. I also always take away any unnecessary accessories.

Such as...

Picture frames. I just go in and round them all up and stick them in a drawer and tell my clients to pick out three and put the rest of them somewhere else. That's the single worst thing I see when I go into a house. And bookcases require careful arrangement, or they're just a mess. The only way to keep a bookcase looking good is to have it full of books.

Or in this case, transferware.

They love brown and white transferware. It's English, around 1850. They're avid antiques collectors, and they like to scuttle around on their own and find things that they want to bring to the table. I love it when someone has that sort of input. Most of the accessories here were chosen before the house was built, which may seem backwards, but it's not. It's all the little accessories and personal things that give a house that look of having evolved over time—and keep it from feeling contrived.

The architecture contributes to that feeling, too.

They didn't want it to look like new construction. The beams on the ceiling help, and so do the Australian cypress floors, which are stained a dark walnut color and are slightly distressed. The shiplap walls are a nice alternative to straight-up wainscot—it's a bit more modern, even though it's still old-fashioned. The great thing about it is that it doesn't restrict what you hang on the walls. People are always concerned about the chair-rail height with wainscot, because they don't know what they're going to hang above it and what they're going to put below it, and what height it should be. So it erases all of that, which is great.

The fabric on the living room chairs also has a traditional floral motif, but the scale is so modern.

Yes, it's a very large scale. It was one of the first fabrics we selected. I send all my light fabrics to a lamination company and have them sealed—it's like a Scotchgard that's soaked in. That way, they don't get dirty as fast. Those are swivel chairs, too, which are very comfortable because you can angle toward the TV or the view or turn to talk to people in the dining room. I love swivels. I especially love swivel rocker-gliders—who doesn't love a rocking chair? It's sort of like one step back from a La-Z-Boy.

The living and dining areas are open to the kitchen, a contemporary floor plan that seems at odds with the 'old-fashioned sensibility' you mentioned earlier. How did you make it work?

All the colors and fabrics had to work together. We avoided shiny or reflective surfaces in the kitchen—the honed black granite counters, brick-style backsplash, copper sink, bronze hardware, and antique-nickel pendant are all matte surfaces that add patina and warmth to the kitchen and help meld it into the living spaces.

Your beds are all so pretty. Any tips you can give us?

Yes. Iron your sheets. It's the ultimate luxury.

I don't even iron my clothes!

At least iron your pillowcases and the fold-back on the flat sheets. That's a good starting point. Or send them out with your shirts. Once you get into that routine, I think you'll find that it's a great habit to adopt, and it lasts until the next time you wash them. I also love a duvet folded at the foot of the bed. You still get the softness and looseness, and I think it makes your bed look a lot neater and prettier. I use shams that match the coverlet, and pillowcases that match the sheet, and then a decorative pillow that's another fabric altogether.

Before you became a designer, you spent 11 years decorating people's houses for Christmas. How would you decorate this one?

I'd use lots of fresh greenery and magnolia, cypress, boxwood, and pinecones. I think good healthy doses of red in the living room would be lovely, and I would do something on that gorgeous pecky-cypress mantel.

What wouldn't you do?

I don't like Santas, reindeer, felt tree-skirts, or overly decorated trees. The best way to get a great-looking tree is just to go to Kmart or Target and buy every gold ball that they have in all different shapes and just put them on with white lights. That's a beautiful tree—so easy and foolproof. Of course, I always have to drag out everything my kids ever made!

PRODUCED BY DORETTA SPERDUTO AND JENNIFER DWYER

RIGHT: In the kitchen, Howard used matte finishes—honed granite, tumbled travertine, glazed wood—to make the room feel like a natural extension of the dining area. A pendant light from Visual Comfort adds a dash of industrial brio to the old-world mix. "That's probably what keeps the room from looking too traditional," says the designer.







The master bedroom is just off the living room, so Howard used a similar palette to ease the transition, adding wood ceilings and an overhead fan to evoke the feeling of a sleeping porch. She upholstered the Left Bank bed from Hickory Chair in an outdoor fabric for easy maintenance. OPPOSITE: A corner of the room is made soft and inviting by a tufted chair and ottoman from Sherrill Furniture, covered in Hinson's Blizzard Chenille.





Howard hung 19th-century English transferware and antique horns in the upstairs hall: "Something three-dimensional breaks up the monotony of just hanging pictures." OPPOSITE: The owners wanted the downstairs to be neutral but the upstairs to have color, inspiring the apple-green guest room, painted Benjamin Moore's Glazed Green. Bed and curtain fabric is Laura Ashley's Springfield in mist. "Repeating a big-scale fabric in a small room expands the sense of space."







"There are certain things a Southern woman always has in a house," says the designer. "Number one is monograms. You cannot *beat* monograms out of a Southerner." The headboard is covered in Harris from Sanderson. Wallpaper is Sanderson's Meadow Flowers. Howard likes to use writing tables in bedrooms because they can serve as a desk, dressing table, or nightstand. Furniture and bedding are from Mrs. Howard. FOR MORE DETAILS, SEE RESOURCES.

