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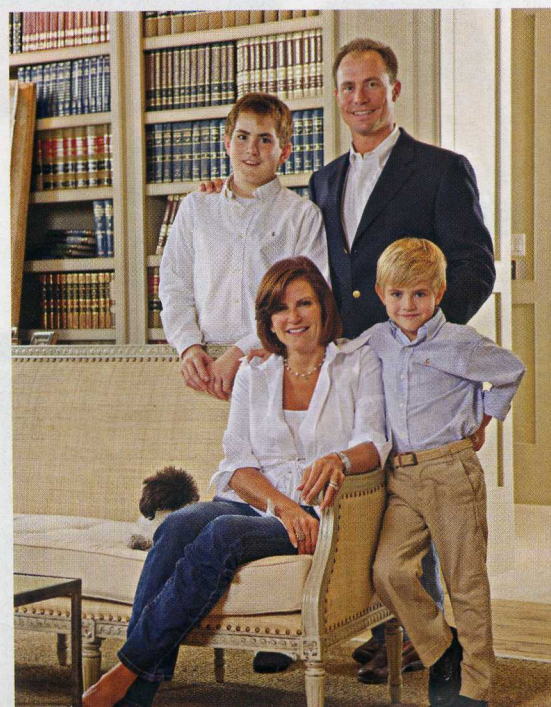
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A builder by trade, Brian Thompson has overseen the remodeling or construction of four of his family's homes in the Houston area. So this isn't exactly the story of the cobbler's shoeless kids. There is a moral, however, and it pertains to design: Take a new tack on tradition, and it may take you by surprise.

To move into this new English country-style home, the Thompson family only had to go around the corner in the neighborhood they love. But for Brian's wife, Katherine, it was a big leap in terms of style. "Our last house was more eclectic and layered," she says. "It had richer, darker colors. This house is definitely a different look for us. It's larger but with a lot less stuff. It took some getting used to, but I love this style now."

The style is a signature look for designer Kevin Spearman of Bellacasa Designs, a firm Brian has admired and worked with



Right, far right, and preceding pages: Katherine and Brian Thompson gather with sons John, 15, and Will, 7, along with Bear, the family pooch, in the expansive great room of their year-old home.

Above: In the living room, a grid of antique botanicals flanked by salvaged columns imparts quiet beauty.





Above and right: A honed black-granite-and-Carrara-marble checkerboard floor flows from the kitchen to an adjacent sunroom to give the home an established feel. The trestle table and eclectic seating, including a primitive antique bench, add family function with less visual bulk than the originally planned second island.

Top right: Just through the open doors of the sunroom where John, Will, and sister Courtney hang out is a stone-walled loggia where the whole family often entertains.

Left: Brian built the English country-style home near downtown Houston.





for years. Spearman describes the home as having “timeless appeal and a humble presence.” Translated: classic and collected. “We achieve our style by using such classic elements in the home’s shell as traditional moldings and mantels, and wall, window, and ceiling treatments,” notes the designer. “Then we couple those with antique furnishings and quiet, textured surfaces.”

The interiors have few patterns and limited fabrics, but the eye is still entertained, thanks to statuesque furniture shapes and textural walls, floors, and fabrics. Accessories are used more sparingly. The pieces that did make the cut from the couple’s collection of treasures offer pops of color and personality.

Katherine succumbed to the idea of a pared down look after a few attempts at bringing forward vestiges of the family’s previous house. “In the beginning, I kept putting a few more things out while Brian was at work,” she remembers with a laugh. “But he would just come home and shake his head. So I ended up renting a storage area. I figure I’ll hold onto some things; we’re bound to move in a couple of years, so I’ll wait to see what the style of our next house will be.”

For now, the spare look has advantages for this busy family of five, which includes Courtney, 17, John, 15, and Will, 7. For one, it’s easy to keep up. Less means less dusting. Fewer layers also means more room for hanging out with friends. The house was designed for entertaining all ages. “We put all of our entertaining spaces downstairs,” says Brian, “and all of the private spaces, including the master bedroom, upstairs. We even pushed the house forward on the lot so that we had a bigger backyard.”







Adds Katherine, “When you have teenagers, you want to coax the entertaining to the downstairs. It keeps them from disappearing upstairs behind closed doors.”

The Thompsons adjusted the floor plan to make the house live the way they want it to. The kitchen opens to a large sunroom space rather than a small breakfast room. The classic granite-and-marble checkerboard floor ties the two spaces together and evokes the look of an older home. In the sunroom, the most popular spot for the kids to gather, horizontal planked walls warm the room, as do the layered floor coverings: an antique rug over a seagrass rug. The pivot point between the kitchen, sunroom, and adjacent family room is an antique table and chairs used for casual family meals. The great room space, with its beamed and planked vaulted ceiling, is divided into several intimate seating areas ideal for entertaining.

Also ready for company is what designer Spearman calls the “wow” room, a.k.a. the dining room. The space was paneled, then painted in an earthy green to simplify the backdrop. The floors are vintage oak with a raw, weathered finish. A casual trestle table has a related relaxed look, even with the more formal French chairs drawn around it. But the stunners are the

A demilune bay window in the dining room provides a dramatic stage for the family’s grand piano. Like the rest of the house, this room offers a visual punch without relying on layers of pattern or objects. The contrast of the formal piano and Louis-style chairs with the casual weathered oak floors and painted twig chandelier stirs up interest.



baby grand piano and the white-painted branch chandelier. “We topped off the room with the surprise of the ‘edgy’ chandelier,” says designer Spearman. “It throws the room in a more artistic direction without sacrificing comfort and approachability.”

Upstairs, the master bedroom is equally minimalist, but it’s more “ahhh” than “wow.” The focal point is a custom headboard upholstered in fine linen and monogrammed. The foot of the high bed has its own unique mark—an antique writing table replaces the ubiquitous bench for another design surprise.

What isn’t surprising is that Brian already has his sights on building another home for his family in yet another style. Next time, he wants to build in the plantation style of famed Louisiana architect A. Hays Town.

Will Katherine get her layers back? The outcome of that story remains to be seen. ■

Interior designer: Kevin Spearman

For more information, see sources on page 174

Right: The master bedroom exudes the home’s calm, cool, and collected style. It starts with quality, found here in fine linen bedding and fabrics. Add a few choice antiques, such as the writing table and ottoman, and the style is enriched by the past. Comfort and light are also pivotal players. Note how the sofa basks in the glow of simply treated windows. **Above:** The bathroom floor’s dark green tiles were supposed to be white, but Katherine now loves the way they ground the room.



