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MEREDITH SPECIALS



# LOVE AFFAIR

Inspired by New Orleans — where their story began — a Houston couple write a new chapter in an all-American house filled with European style.

WRITER MARA BOG | PHOTOGRAPHER JULIE SCOFER | PRODUCER JESSICA BRINKERT HOLTAM

OPPOSITE: Built to look a hundred years old, Mignon and Stephen Gill's Houston home features a push-to-open front door handle like those at Le Meurice, Mignon's favorite Paris hotel. THIS PHOTO: A tribal rug and an acrylic-resin coffee table temper the formality of the living room's dentil molding and antique French limestone fireplace surround.





**C**rab cakes. Gumbo. White-painted brick. All are synonymous with New Orleans. And all played a sentimental role in the design of Mignon and Stephen Gill's new Houston home, which they share with their two teenagers. "I'm from Louisiana and grew up going to New Orleans every weekend," Mignon says. "My husband and I both went to law school in Louisiana, and we lived in New Orleans early in our marriage. We love everything about New Orleans and wanted our home to be reflective of our time there."

From the kitchen designed to accommodate Mignon's love of cooking traditional Louisiana foods to the wrought-iron exterior balcony inspired by one photographed in New Orleans, the Gills' home is an architectural love letter to Louisiana. Architectural features were drawn directly from the state's rich history of centuries-old homes.

"Two hundred years ago, long before the days of air-conditioning, French Colonial-style houses usually featured porches supported by columns," architect Travis Mattingly says. "The porches were used for outdoor relaxation and entertaining. Inside, ceilings were tall and windows opened from the top to let warm air escape." In the Gills' home that's a check, check, and check—although their ceilings don't quite stretch to historical 14-foot heights, and evenings spent outdoors are more about connecting with close-knit neighbors than

fleeing indoor heat. Still, the house is a mostly authentic replica of iconic French Colonial style and blends easily into its older neighborhood.

Which is why the pink leather-clad powder room door just over the threshold comes as a surprise and offers the first clue that the house is not entirely bound by its architectural heritage. "Mignon is drawn to things that are French and antique—and also to things that are clean and colorful," says interior designer Jennifer Martinez, who collaborated with fellow interior designer Sarah Liuzzi on the house. "We didn't try to match things so much as make sure they worked well together."

Furnishings—some inspired by, or purchased during, the family's European travels; others bought new or reused from the Gills' former home—are united by a soft palette of pale blues and blush pinks warmed by brass accents. Colorful art, nearly all by Louisiana artisans, provides unexpected verve. "This house makes me happy," Mignon says. "I never want to leave." Unless she's headed to New Orleans, that is.

FOR RESOURCES, SEE PAGE 100.

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ABOVE: In the kitchen, modern brass stools upholstered in vinyl offset classic veined white marble countertops and dark-stained hardwood floors. OPPOSITE: The dining room walls are papered in a grasscloth chosen for its muted color story.





ABOVE: Flat ceiling trim running the length of the open-plan kitchen and living room mimics the look of a coffered ceiling, but its shallow depth maintains a modern profile, adding just enough interest to cozy the scale of the area while maintaining an airy feel. RIGHT: Vibrant encaustic-concrete floor tiles serve as a graphic counterpoint to all-white cabinetry and walls in the laundry. FAR RIGHT: A traffic-tough brick floor relieves Mignon's sunny office. OPPOSITE: The living room's seating pieces are upholstered in solid fabrics for a quiet effect; interest comes via patterned draperies and colorful art.



“Millwork and trims are substantial and proportional but not fussy. We wanted to go cleaner and sleeker than you might expect.”

INTERIOR DESIGNER JENNIFER MARTINEZ





LEFT: The master bath gains a contemporary edge from marble baseboards. "They're a surprise," Martinez says, "and more functional than wood, since you won't get black marks on them when vacuuming." OPPOSITE: An antique Austrian chandelier illuminates Mignon's dressing room. The island facilitates packing for frequent trips and conceals hampers for both laundry and dry cleaning.

## Q&A with Interior Designer Jennifer Martinez

Building new? Jennifer Martinez discusses ways to include historical design features in a way that feels fresh.



**Q: What rules do you follow to ensure the right mix of now and then?**

**A:** I have a business background in the oil and gas industry—I don't even know what the rules are! In fact, if there are rules, I'm sure I break them all the time. But I do know how I want a room to feel when I walk into it, and that's what guides my choices. I'm not

afraid to mix things up. I like the unexpected. A house should feel beautiful and coordinated—I mean, you don't want it to give you a headache—but it should be filled with things you love that make you happy. That sense of playfulness is what will make your house unique to you. People get stuck thinking

things should match. If you have a traditional room, put a piece of modern art in it. If you have a contemporary room, put something of your grandmother's in it.

**Q: How do you approach fixed elements such as floors and walls?**

**A:** I almost always prefer to use a traditional hardwood floor because I think it's an ideal canvas for mixing other things on top of it. And I like to use one overall paint color for a house to maintain a continuous backdrop, though I also love to paint trim so it matches wallpaper. It's a cool way to make traditional millwork feel up-to-date.

**Q: How did you approach the molding in this house?**

**A:** We didn't want this house to feel like a period piece, so we installed hefty dentil moldings at the ceiling, which is very traditional, and then we made them feel more fun by painting them high-gloss white.



# Floor plan

TOTAL SQ. FT.: 6,994

BEDROOMS: 4

BATHROOMS: 6 full, 2 hal.



Floor plan © Architectural Solutions, Inc

In a decorative play between architecture and furnishings, the master bedroom's plaster walls, 19th-century French chair, and canopied four-poster are juxtaposed with a sleek marble fireplace surround and contemporary art.



