

athome

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MAS TER FUL MAKEOVER

*Vintage Tudor revived
with designer's new vision*

A mix of unexpected materials in hues of silver and gold balances the stainless steel appliances. The upper countertop and both sinks are solid bronze, while the work surface is brushed limestone. Masters says people often shy away from this soft material because of its tendency to etch over time, a trait she finds endearing. The leaded glass doors are a nod to the original leaded sidelights flanking the front door.

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Interior Photography by Fish Eye Studios*



Some folks get spooked by big, old houses, but Cynthia Masters believes any haints in her home are so happy to be free from the Technicolor-meets-shag carpet décor they endured for so many years that they mean her no harm. A native of Greenville who spent her middle, high school and college years in Columbia, Cynthia returned to the Upstate in 1988 after earning her design degree from the University of South Carolina. She regularly traveled Rutherford Road while running errands for her first job with a furniture store on Pleasantburg Drive, and would admire

the weathered Tudor Revival house she passed along the way.

“I would go by this house and say, ‘somebody needs to do something with that house,’” Cynthia remembers, never imagining that a decade or so later that somebody would be her.

Fast forward to the Spring of 2001, by which time Cynthia had launched her own design firm and was enjoying married life with husband, Lance, a dentist with a practice in Greer. A chance cut-through up Rutherford en route to a client’s home on Paris Mountain took her by that old Tudor. And it was for sale.

The Masters worked to preserve the original moldings and wavy glass windows wherever possible. Replacements for moldings that couldn’t be salvaged were milled from the profile of the original.





“I almost had a wreck trying to get into the median, to get turned around, to get into the driveway, to call my realtor,” she remembers. “I knew what I was looking for and I knew what I wanted, and I had always loved this house.”

Her love was real, but there were a few more realities standing in her way, namely a house in Greer and properties in Anderson and Charleston she and Lance had been unsuccessfully trying to sell. And then there

was the matter of a recently purchased lot elsewhere in Greenville, and the architect already toiling away on the house plans. Sometimes a girl’s got to throw caution to the wind: Cynthia spotted the house on Tuesday, looked at it on Wednesday, and made an offer on Thursday.

“We just took a leap of faith and it all worked out, all our pieces of property sold,” Cynthia says. “It was meant to be for us to have this house.”

Cynthia chose a round dining table – which she says is the ideal shape for a square room – to encourage guests to linger and enjoy conversation.

The kitchen renovation exposed a chimney that was once used to vent the coal-burning furnace in the basement. The Masters cut out a small fireplace, which has become a favorite gathering spot for guests.



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The homeowners worked with Graham Kimak Landscape Designs to transform the backyard – once home to a menagerie of out buildings – into a lush oasis ripe for relaxed entertaining.



The house was designed by Willie Ward, an architect whose work graces many of Greenville's historic neighborhoods, and built in 1925 for Walter E. Rush, who owned a car dealership on Laurens Road. Rush lived in the home until 1937, and over the next several decades the house changed hands several times. Cynthia promised Lance that should he agree to be the next owner she wouldn't do a thing to it for a year.

"Before we closed I had my contractors over here," Cynthia remembers, adding that her husband knew better than to believe her

in the first place. "He knew there was no way I'd be able to live with orange shag carpet."

Lance was a good sport, and his congeniality was repaid in spades with an evening-chilling, outdoor-grilling, whiskey-swilling patio that is the envy of all who enter there. And with five years of hard labor, but more on that later.

Structurally speaking, the house was in great shape. Double bricked, no sagging floors to contend with, all in all a solid, well-built home. But somewhere along the way the décor took a detour. For six years

A former coat closet became a tiny jewel box of a powder room on the main level. Cynthia chose to house the tank in the wall and install the smallest sink she could find to garner more space, adding a mirror to make it feel larger still. Guests duke it out over their favorites of the two guest rooms, both of which Cynthia has verified as guest-worthy by staying the night in them herself – as every good hostess should. The guest bathroom is equally inviting.





the Masters lived with robin's egg blue kitchen cabinets and a previous owner's inexplicable decision to drop the original nine-and-a-half foot ceilings to eight feet using acoustic tile. Draperies were in tatters. Bedrooms were painted in vivid hues of green and blue. The dining room was hot pink with big floral wallpaper. It's no wonder the home languished on the market for months before the Masters came along – this diamond in the rough required more than a vision. It needed X-ray vision.

Cynthia set about on her mission to restore

the home to its former glory. The first step was to move her design business, Panageries, from its downtown location into the house. That required 21 straight 15-hour days of stripping, scrubbing and hauling decades of detritus. For the next 18 months the couple lived in a former carriage house at the rear of the property while rendering the main house livable. Another flip-flop brought the Masters to the big house, and Panageries took up permanent residence in the carriage house.

Priority one for Cynthia was to preserve as much of the original architecture as possible. All of the



While the home does boast a rare-for-the-time walk-in closet, Cynthia designed a grouping of mirrored cabinets to create additional storage and give the master bedroom a larger feel. The Tiffany glass motif from the front door is again repeated in the master bathroom – a vision in white marble. Renowned architect Willie Ward designed the Masters' 1925 home. Cynthia with her beloved Great Dane, Tiny Bean.



windows, with the exception of a handful that were broken, boast the original wavy glass, and radiators still ward off winter's chill. The quarter sawn oak floors are down to their last sanding, so Cynthia's beloved Great Dane submits her nails to regular Dremel sessions to protect against gouges.

Lance sold his dental practice and spent the next five years stripping the moldings down to the raw wood and rebuilding them – a process that took 40 hours for each section of molding. He has since returned to dentistry.

The Masters were once downtown regulars, dining out an average of three times a week. But after 12 years of pouring their blood, sweat and tears into the restoration of their home, these days they prefer to have the party come to them. Pretty sure the party is okay with that. ah

The patio was designed with Lance in mind. An outdoor kitchen complete with refrigerator and television plays regular host to golfing buddies and provides the perfect setting for an evening cocktail.



