

# GRAND AMBITIONS

AN EXQUISITE ESTATE IS RETURNED TO ITS EARLY 1900S  
GLORY, WITH SEAMLESS UPDATES FOR MODERN LIVING

TEXT **ANH-MINH LE** | PHOTOGRAPHY **JOHN MERKL**



The library, which features new and original built-ins, was given a moody makeover with Benjamin Moore's Polo Blue, custom furniture and a pair of Rebekah Callaghan paintings.

**OPPOSITE** In the entry — illuminated by a Visual Comforts chandelier — a vintage rug from Tony Kitz Gallery and table from 1stDibs top the home's original herringbone parquet floors.





**W**HEN A PROMINENT PROPERTY in town hits the real estate market, it tends to elicit plenty of curiosity. And so it was that in 2018, interior designer Alexis Smith found herself walking through the four stories of a grand estate in Piedmont.

“I don’t need to own it,” she remembers telling her husband. “I just need to design it, because I’m afraid someone is going to ruin it.”

She seemingly spoke it into existence. Not long after, the home’s new owners — a healthcare executive and a self-described “chief purchasing officer/home chef” — enlisted Smith to update the 1901 Colonial Revival residence, while staying true to its architectural integrity. “It needed a lot of TLC,” says Smith. Although it showed its age and wear, thankfully, many original attributes — like the box-beam ceilings, high wainscot and fluted pilasters — remained intact.

In collaboration with RM Builders and Sherman Architecture, Smith’s firm, Shoshin, restored the splendor of the 8,000-square-foot abode. To their credit, the new elements don’t necessarily feel new. “Of course, people live differently now than they did in 1901,” says Smith, referencing the kitchen and primary suite in particular. “It was very important to the clients that those spaces have the same proportion and scale and details as the rest of the home.”

In the formal living room, a 1940s French gilt and mirror cocktail table, a Visual Comfort pendant, Vaughn sconces, a rug from Tony Kitz Gallery and custom upholstered furniture create a sophisticated scheme.







**ABOVE** Benjamin Moore's Simply White and Calacatta Gold marble brighten the kitchen, whose soapstone-topped island has details, like dentil molding and fluted legs, that echo the home's original architecture. **RIGHT** Old and new harmonize in the kitchen corner, appointed with 19th-century Swedish Biedermeier chairs, a Noir table and a Moroccan-style lantern from L'Aviva Home. **OPPOSITE** The Keith Fritz dining table is flanked by 1920s Swedish chairs, upholstered in a Hodsoll McKenzie fabric, with a circa-1880 Khorasan carpet underfoot and a vintage Jean-Marc Fray chandelier overhead.

On the main floor, the old kitchen and two other small rooms were combined to yield an expansive venue that better suits its current occupants (which includes three kids in elementary and middle school). The white walls, ceiling and perimeter cabinetry are anchored by a soapstone-topped wood island with dentil molding and fluted legs. Of the island, Smith notes that "we tried to come up with something that felt like it belonged in the house, with the type of millwork it had."

Elsewhere on the same level, the enclosed porch was elevated to match the elegance of the adjacent formal living room. Smith introduced marble floor tiles in a classic checkerboard motif and a Hector Finch hanging lantern. In the library, just off the foyer, she kept the existing glass-front built-in bookcases; installed additional built-ins along the opposite wall, including a sofa; and unified the entire room with Benjamin Moore's Polo Blue.







The primary bedroom includes a Hickory Chair bed (dressed in Matouk linens), Tritter Feefer nightstands, a rug from Tony Kitz Gallery and custom window treatments (Kravet sheers and Roman shades with Samuel & Sons trim).



**ABOVE** Petite but packing major visual punch, the powder room features Farrow & Ball's De Nimes, Fermoie lampshades, a Palmer Industries vanity console and Graff faucet. **TOP RIGHT** The dressing room beckons with Visual Comfort lighting, a rug from Tony Kitz Gallery and a custom ottoman upholstered in a Kravet fabric — set against a Kravet wallpaper and Farrow & Ball's James White. **RIGHT** The fireplace — clad in Ann Sacks tiles and one of eight in the home — is a focal point of the primary bedroom, made further inviting by the George Smith chaise.

Throughout the project, Smith allowed for “moments of tension,” juxtaposing different styles and provenances. Take the dining room, where wainscot and a Phillip Jeffries wallcovering serve as the backdrop for a Jean-Marc Fray Murano glass chandelier procured from a vintage dealer; a work by San Francisco-based abstract, figurative oil painter Laina Terpstra; and 1920s Victorian-style Swedish dining chairs upholstered in a Hodson McKenzie chenille-and-linen fabric. In a new powder room, awash in Farrow & Ball's De Nimes, Smith lined the walls with traditional paneling, then brought in a marble console and an asymmetric contemporary faucet by Graff.

By incorporating antique and vintage furnishings — some even older than the house itself — Smith imbued the interiors with a lived-in sensibility as well as individuality. “It's nice to have something that maybe not everybody has or could just order out of a catalog,” she explains. And again, there's the matter of creating compelling juxtapositions; for example, in a kitchen corner, 19th-century Swedish Biedermeier dining chairs provide seating at a Noir table with a zig-zag base.

“I'm a nerd for the details found in older homes,” says Smith, the daughter of an architect. “That I got to help bring this one back to life, with people who completely respect what was original but were also willing to take some risks and do some things that felt interesting and playful, it was such a pleasure.” **CH**

