



Comfort ZONE

By Julie Catalano
Photography by Sara Natsumi Moore



First time homeowners in the trendy North Loop neighborhood of Austin soon faced another daunting first — working with a professional to turn their midcentury house into a home. Austin interior designer Maureen Stevens stepped in to help make the whole experience a comfy, creative collaboration they're still talking about.



throughout the 2,114-square-foot house near Hyde Park: orange in a tufted bedroom bench; flamingo art from Etsy and bright emerald pillows in a guest bedroom; a turquoise door; and orange shapes in a sea of blues in a commissioned abstract painting by Austin artist Dawn Winter, reflecting the couple's trip to Croatia. "She used our favorite photographs to create that," says the homeowner. "I was a little nervous because I thought, 'What if I hate it?'" She didn't. It has become one of the coolest conversation pieces in the house.

Not that there weren't some lively discussions along the way. Stevens had recommended wallpaper for the master bedroom — a no go for the husband. "I'm not one to push a client into something they would be uncomfortable with," says Stevens, adding, "I pushed a little bit, but not much." The neutral light grey paint that flowed through the rest of the house stayed put.

And then there was the living room couch that actually came with the house. It was love at first sight for the homeowners. "My first instinct was to replace it, but the clients loved it so I made it work," recalls Stevens who believes designers should never compromise a client's wants or needs. She balanced the green-striped double wide against surrounding neutrals, layering it with throw pillows and topping it with a striking pop-art style duo overhead. A solid elm coffee table from Restoration Hardware sits atop a white patchwork cowhide rug from Anthropologie. Table lamps are from Regina Andrew and Arteriors.

With friends and family frequently coming over for casual get-togethers, seating was essential. That led to a "conversation nook" in the corner of the living room off the kitchen, with two deconstructed French slipper chairs from Restoration Hardware in distressed walnut with fabric/burlap upholstery. Across the way sits a gorgeous early 20th century carved oak cabinet in Jacobean style from England, obtained from an auction site. The multicultural, artisan-made vibe continues with a stunning buffet table that Stevens sourced from sustainability-focused CARGO Imported Furniture in Florida. The reclaimed wood table set with a bright blue vignette faces the French doors leading to the courtyard.

The antique feel is echoed in the couple's early 20th century dresser in the master bedroom, along with the desk in the home office that belonged to the husband's grandfather and a gleaming metal trunk from the wife's grandmother. The warm feeling is carried through in a swivel leather armchair



They were laid back, communicative, decisive and very organized," sums up Stevens. The homeowners were even more succinct in return: "She really listened to us." They all agreed that nobody wanted to get stuck in the sixties, plus the couple had their own treasured pieces that needed to be incorporated into the design. The result is a contemporary eclectic space with a relaxed midcentury feel that includes a nod to the couple's history.

After removing the outdated space-gobbling built-ins, Stevens was ready to shepherd the young couple away from their signature beiges and browns into more colorful midcentury modern territory, but gently. "We always wanted to do color," says the homeowner, "but never had any idea how to make it work."

Stevens did, using mini-bursts of color





by Arhaus, perfect for solo reading or studying, framed by a bookcase and drapery, both from Crate & Barrel.

Budget can be a sticky subject, but communication is key there, too. The biggest furniture buys were the master bedroom dresser from NOIR/CFC and the reclaimed wood media console from One Kings Lane in the living room. “It really came down to they are never going to go out of style,” says the homeowner. “We can put them in different rooms and spaces if needed, and they are quality pieces that are going to last a really long time. I love them so much, it was worth it.”

Visitors are delighted with the mix of old and new, with one friend noticing that the house is “styled but not overly styled and completely functional.” The homeowners chalk that up to their luck in choosing a designer who took the time to really know them, and one that they “clicked with.”

Stevens advises anyone working with a designer, whether it’s for the first time or the hundredth, to “be honest. These clients were some of the best I’ve had, telling me when something was their style and when it wasn’t.” She also cautions not to worry about hurting the designer’s feelings, because clients have to live with their choices long after the designer has left. In the end, it is all about the client and their lives. “I think every home should tell a story,” says Stevens, “but it’s not my story. It’s theirs.” For these brand new homeowners in their blast from the past house and upscale-funky couch, it’s a story with a happy ending. ♦

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