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Vintage reupholstered chairs and a vintage painted table acquired from the original owner create the perfect vignette in the sitting room. Sweany not only loves plants but also wants to pull the outside in whenever and wherever possible. A thrifted radio mingles magically with surrounding thrifted artwork to round out the welcoming space.





MODERN LOVE

INTERIOR DESIGNER BRANDIE SWEANY TOOK HER LOVE OF MODERN ARCHITECTURE AND CHARACTER-DRIVEN SPACES AND APPLIED IT LIBERALLY TO HER DURHAM HOME.



Floor-to-ceiling windows bathe the dining/living room in light. A Seno table and Svelti chairs by Article add perfect seating for small or larger groups, and pendants by Rejuvenation add a bit of drama. Various found art pieces dot the walls, including a piece over the piano created by the original owner of the home. A Lane Brutalist hutch salvaged from a garage sale creates a little depth and character in the room, while the vintage 1955 Mason & Hamlin piano, purchased from the original homeowner, brings a warm mid-century era appeal to the room.



When the Sweany family decided it was time for more space, they gave themselves plenty of time to find the right home. Coming from a small 1950s traditional house in downtown Durham, they had an idea of exactly what they wanted. For the following year and a half, they looked in and around for an older home that was a modern architectural gem. Although the market for these in Durham is plentiful, their popularity has driven up the cost.

“Unbeknownst to me, my mother had visited one of these homes and told the homeowner’s daughter that I would love a home just like it,” Brandie Sweany, homeowner and principal designer of Studio Evloh, recalls. “When the elderly homeowner passed just over a year later, the daughter called my mother and asked if I might want to view the home before she put it on the market.” Though the home had an ideal layout for her family and sat on a one-acre wooded lot, it took five visits to the house before Sweany decided to pull the trigger and purchase it. “My first hesitation was that it was too large and too far from downtown,” Sweany says. “Nine years in downtown walking and biking everywhere made the thought of moving farther a little scary. But we came to the realization that we would be foolish to pass it up—and here we are!”

Construction on the home had been completed in 1970, and it had remained relatively untouched since. As Sweany puts it, “It was kind of like walking into a time warp.” She adds that you could tell immediately that in its prime,



the home was indeed something special. But with years of collections covering up spaces and some neglect on the interiors, the house needed many repairs that only became visible once empty. “The first year, it sort of felt like we bought a money pit—but there was no mistaking its potential,” Sweany remembers.

“The front ‘California courtyard’ was covered in giant, overgrown cactuses, which were actually really beautiful, but also super impractical with a two- and four-year-old,” Sweany says. “A greenhouse located off the dining room was caving in and had to be taken down immediately, which, coupled with the wallpaper stripping and floors, became our first big step in making the house livable.”

Sweany set about creating harmony between inside and outside, new life and original architecture. That fluidity needed to carry through—not only from room to room but throughout their life as well. “I wanted to create a design that was timeless, yet flexible,” she explains. “It could evolve as the kids grew and the family aged, and our priorities and lifestyle shifted.” They replaced all the carpet with white-oak wood floors, gave everything a fresh coat of paint, and replaced all the boxed lighting with fixtures or recessed LED lighting. Next, Sweany hired a landscaper to come in and redesign the courtyard, which included the addition of raised garden beds and a new fence, visually connecting it with the kitchen.



LEFT: Rift sewn white-oak veneer cabinets are stained black to bring an earthy feel to the mid-century modern kitchen, and quartz countertops in sand brighten the space. Black-wire style hardware provides a sleek silhouette and a handmade kilim wool rug by World Menagerie brings some warmth. A custom-cut stainless steel countertop on the island reduces maintenance and germs while getting softer with use. The walnut Crosby stool from Rejuvenation speaks harmoniously to the walnut hardware on the cabinets.

TOP RIGHT: Sweany, shown relaxing in her sitting room, was reluctant at first to move farther away from her original downtown Durham location but now soaks up as much time in her architectural gem as possible.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Black-stained white oak veneer cabinets create a moody and earthy kitchen and are carried through to the adjacent breakfast area, with plenty of storage to boot. A series of collected items dot the shelves inside the cabinets. Various found objects, gifts, and secondhand items create an edited and complementary look.





Speaking of the kitchen, the Sweanys waited almost four years after moving before touching the kitchen. “Our vision for the kitchen was an open and peaceful space that felt centered in the natural surroundings.” She adds that the woods behind the home felt “rich and moody,” with light continually filtering through the trees. It was this inspiration they used to design the kitchen. “It was important for the finishes to complement the materials that were staying,” Sweany says. “That included the multi-colored slate floor with hues of brown, teal, black, and eggplant, the now prominent tan brick wall, the natural white-oak floors, and the dark-brown stain and aluminum metal accents used on the screen porch.” From there, they created high contrast by choosing black stained white-oak cabinets with walnut pulls on the largest doors and simple black wire pulls on the rest. The result was a rich and earthy feel, perfect in the marriage of outdoors and indoors.

The eleven-foot island is covered in a custom stainless-steel top with an integrated sink, making wipedown a breeze. For the

TOP: At the entry, vintage mid-century modern art found at a dear friend’s yard sale greets guests. A custom walnut bench from Etsy is the perfect perch for the day’s weight, and greenery from local Durham shop The Zen Succulent brings some instant cheer.

BOTTOM: A bright yellow door is the hallmark of the Sweany home, painted in Sherwin-Williams Kingdom Gold. Vintage metal chairs in white add a punch of character.

OPPOSITE: Sherwin-Williams paint in Dried Thyme bathes the mudroom built-ins in a calming color; hardware complements the kitchen for an overall cohesiveness that’s hard to resist. Custom pillows and a found rug bring a bit of coziness to the stop and drop.





cabinet wall, Sweany chose a sand-colored quartz countertop, which she carried up the backsplash wall for additional easy maintenance. “Efficiency of the space was paramount, so we placed items at the exact location we planned to use them,” she says. “You don’t have to move far for much of anything.”

The adjacent den was designed for flexibility. Currently, the kids hang out there while dinner is prepared. There is plenty of storage for crafts, games, and homework necessities. “We knew we might want it to function in various ways in the future,” Sweany says. “We made sure that we could fit our dining room table in the event it relocates from the living room, and have even considered a small television and lounge seating once the kids are grown.”

Though the house has gone through and will continue to go through many changes, the goal for the Sweany family is always the same: sustainability, flexibility, and functionality. All of these are covered with the latest renovation of kitchen, den, and mudroom. “I love what the house has turned into over the past five years,” Sweany says. “There is something so deep-felt in connecting with your home and your surroundings. We all really enjoy being in the kitchen now. It’s super efficient and functional, and in moving the kitchen to be right off the screen porch, we use it a lot more.”

“I now have a great downtown office for my design studio, but I find myself wanting to spend more and more time working from home.” Ultimately, isn’t that the goal?◆