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WHEN VICKY SERANY WAS FINALLY ABLE TO DESIGN HER OWN HOME FROM THE GROUND UP, SHE PULLED OUT ALL THE STOPS.

TEXT BY JILL WALDBIESER | PHOTOGRAPHY BY DUSTIN PECK



Serany's husband, Dan, has taken up guitar, so his home office doubles as a music room. It opens up to a courtyard behind the house, so he can practice inside or out. The grid of black-and-white photographs is Dan's collection of manhole covers. **OPPOSITE:** Serany commissioned the dining room art from her friend, artist Susan Hecht. The asymmetrical light fixture by Arteriors adds an air of playfulness. Highland House chairs and pottery purchased on a recent trip to the Amalfi Coast showcase Serany's use of texture.



AFTER TWENTY YEARS of designing some of the region's most beautiful homes, Vicky Serany had seen her share of impressive architecture and design. But in the end, what drew her to the space where she would eventually build her own family home wasn't square footage or a lush landscape—it was the beverage situation. "I wanted to be able to walk for coffee in the morning and for wine in the evening," says Serany, founder and principal of Southern Studio Interior Design.

The lot in Cary was conveniently situated for both, but it had other challenges. At just thirty-five feet across, it was long and narrow, and it had to meet some specific zoning requirements. Serany found inspiration in the architecture of historic Charleston, South Carolina, and with the help of local designer Tony Frazier and her own team at Southern Studio, she was able to make her dream of a casual, comfortable, well-designed family home a reality.

From the start, Serany knew that using space efficiently was key. "I wanted something livable, but not large," she says. "I wanted beautiful detail, but didn't need square footage. I really thought about the way we live and what we needed in our home."



TERESA STUDIOS



The living room is one of the more casual, comfortable areas of the home. Serany says she “bit the bullet” on a large sectional from Highland House, but making it fit in a smaller space was a challenge. The open floor plan and the delicate accent pieces help. The fireplace is wrapped in leathered steel gray granite with a wooden mantle that echoes the ceiling beams.

Serany uses the light, bright loft area at the top of the stairs as a workspace. Captain Morgan, the family dog, loves the spot as well. The gold wall-mounted table is a piece from Stray Dog Designs that was in their former house, and special measures were taken to ensure that it fit perfectly in this space. "It's a special piece," says Serany, pointing out that the leaves are actually papier-mâché.





While the main house is a study in neutrals, the small guest apartment above the detached garage was Serany's opportunity to play with pattern and color. "It's such a small space that I wanted to test and push myself," she says.



The staircase is central to the house, but because Serany didn't want open balusters, she enclosed the area with paneling and added a wet bar/beverage station. The entire counter, sink included, is fabricated from a single piece of quartzite.

Those needs included space that could be pressed into more than one function as needed: home office or music studio, dining room or meeting space. "I wanted a big, open plan with flexible spaces," says Serany, who occasionally works from home, as does her husband, Dan. They each have their own spaces: she frequents the upstairs loft while he has a room that opens onto a courtyard. He uses it for work and play, having recently taken up guitar. And because they plan to stay in this home into their retirement years, Serany wanted the option of moving the primary suite downstairs at some point, if necessary.

The shape of the lot called for an open floor plan if they wanted to maximize natural light, so the staircase is at the center of the house. Serany considered balusters a waste

of space, so she enclosed the stairs with walls that feature millwork instead.

Of course, the open floor plan meant Serany had to use all her interior design skills to create distinct rooms in the 2,800-square-foot home. "We defined spaces by using ceiling detail more than walls," she says. The entire second floor lacks drywall, with only tongue-and-groove paneling instead. Floors became similarly important. The primary bathroom maintains its warmth with a wood floor, the integrity of which is preserved by the creation of a "wet room"—a freestanding tub enclosed in a shower stall, which keeps moisture in its designated area.

Serany favors natural materials like wood and stone, and a largely neutral palette, but details like trim and millwork



The walnut island makes a fitting centerpiece for the long, narrow kitchen, and is topped with quartzite that matches the backsplash. Rather than a formal breakfast nook, Serany added a bar-height table, also walnut, because "we don't often use it in homes."



LEFT: Serany likes to add a visual pause between common areas and private spaces, and this nook just off the primary bedroom proved to be the perfect spot for it. Because the rest of the home is so light and bright, she lent this alcove some moodiness with handmade textural wallpaper by Vahallan.

ABOVE: In this guest bedroom, Serany made a daring departure from her usual neutral palette, pulling green from a painting by Nancy McClure from ArtSource and splashing it on the nightstand, the dresser, and the barn-style closet door.

add plenty of interest. Her coworkers at Southern Studio frequently tease her that her favorite color is a texture, and from upholstered Highland House chairs to textural wallpaper, everywhere you look there is a surface begging you to run your hand over it.

Any color that is in the home is often pulled from artwork Serany has collected over the years. The entire concepts for the dining room and a guest bedroom are pulled from shades used prominently in the paintings that hang in them.

One of the benefits of being able to design from the ground up was the ability to create spaces around favorite possessions and treasured collections. The living room features a growing gallery wall of street art purchased on the family's many vacations, and in Dan's office/music room, a grid of framed photographs of manhole covers dominates one wall; he makes a point of taking a photo of one in every new

city they visit. "Collecting art during our travels gives us a story and memory," says Serany.

In the scullery off the kitchen hangs a collection of framed recipes handwritten by Serany's grandmother. "I love seeing her handwriting every day," she says. The walk-in pantry was part of her master vision for the kitchen, but she wanted it to have its own vibe, so she changed up the hardware, countertops, and flooring, using natural slate in a Versailles pattern with contrasting cream grout.

The narrowness of the lot constrained the dimensions of the kitchen somewhat, but it still functions beautifully, says Serany. Because she doesn't like to interrupt traffic flow in the kitchen while entertaining, and beverages rate high on her priority list, Serany added a separate wet bar away from the kitchen, at the base of the stairs. That way, people can serve themselves without getting in the host's way.

Working on her own home has been, she says, both easier and more difficult than her client's projects. But she's happy with how it turned out. "It was a really fun project to design," she says. It suits her lifestyle now, coffee and wine included. "This is a new phase of life for us," says Serany, "and this house makes it so we like to be at home." ♦

The wooden double doors and round pillars on the wraparound porch are elements borrowed from historic Charleston homes. With a huge magnolia tree lending natural privacy, the porch is an ideal place to sit and enjoy cocktails and conversation with friends.

