

PERSONAL

A Birmingham couple call on an old friend to renovate their home.

CONNECTIONS



BY ELIOT NUSBAUM PHOTOGRAPHY BY COLLEEN DUFFLEY PRODUCED BY LYNN NESMITH



Margaret Head, seated, and longtime friend decorator Mary Evelyn McKee. Left: A red-patterned fabric screen makes a colorful background for the living room furnishings, including matching antique armchairs that mix well with contemporary pieces.



When Margaret and Holman Head decided to renovate and enlarge their home, they called on a childhood friend,

interior decorator Mary Evelyn McKee. Margaret and Mary Evelyn grew up together in Birmingham, became friends in junior high school, and both studied art history at Hollins College in Virginia. In short, they were (and are still) sympathetic spirits.

To fill out their design team, McKee drew on her professional friendship with architect Bill Ingram. She had worked with the well-known architect before and knew his sensitive approach was just what the Heads were looking for to design an addition to their 1920s Tudor Revival-style home.

The Heads had outgrown their home of seven years, but they loved the charm and convenience of their Mountain Brook neighborhood. Their house sits between the equally delightful communities of Mountain Brook Village and English Village, two of the three towns (Crestline is the third) laid out in the early 20th century by landscape architect Warren Manning.

The combination of a long narrow lot and the owners' love of the home's front elevation, with its exaggerated roofline, front chimney, and arched doorway, directed placement of a much needed addition at the back of the residence.

"The original 1920s Tudor cottage had all the pieces and parts of a big house, but it was really quite modest in terms of square footage," explains Ingram. To make room to add on, a



The arched fireplace in the new library was inspired by a photograph. Its large scale and low iron sconces create an intimate setting. The emphasis on comfort makes this the perfect room for conversation, drinks, or just reading a book. **Left:** Because the Heads loved the look of the front facade, they placed a needed addition at the back of the house.



the goal
was to keep
the cottage
charm.



Left: The breakfast room is designed with a curved banquette tucked between two cabinets. **Right:** The dining room is just two steps up from the living room. The table and chairs are antiques. The painting is by Scott Hill. **Below:** The palette in the new kitchen was kept light. Thick walls allow for appliance niches. **Above:** An antique chest and Oushak rug mix with a sisal stair runner in the foyer.



detached two-car garage with a second-floor apartment was demolished. Fortunately, the razed structure was constructed with the same bricks as the house, which meant they could be salvaged to ensure the new addition blended seamlessly with the original home.

Also helping to tie the new to the old is the bluestone terrace. It was extended across the entire back of the house and connects to the end of the addition, an octagonal pavilion that contains the new master suite. The enlarged terrace allowed Ingram to create exterior living areas for lounging, dining, and conversation. Through such devices, he was able to keep the scale of the addition modest while giving the Heads the space they wanted and even adding to the home's basic charm.

Likewise, Ingram and McKee kept much of that built-in cottage charm in the interiors. "I try to keep a part of the original house in any renovation or redecorating," explains the decorator. This blend of old and new starts in the foyer, where an old stairway to the basement was removed to make room for a bar, while the original staircase to the second floor was preserved but lightened with a sisal runner.



Left: A large and dramatic arched window allows light to stream into the master bath, while a freestanding screen provides privacy. **Above:** The master suite pavilion and the dining room's bay window anchor one end of the newly added bluestone terrace. **Below:** A vignette in the dining room echoes the room's window treatment. The antique mirror reflects light from the bay window.

The subtle blend is perhaps most eloquently executed, however, in the living room. The room itself sits slightly askew, reflecting the gentle curve of the house. The original limestone fireplace remains the centerpiece of the room, but Ingram enhanced the original barrel-vault ceiling by adding new cornice moldings and gridlike fretwork.

McKee chose a sophisticated persimmon red to unify the living spaces. For furniture, she mixed old and modern pieces, including a pair of antique walnut armchairs, a couple of new slipper chairs, a Barbara Barry sofa, and an interesting contemporary coffee table. A red-patterned fabric screen anchors one corner of the room.

The dining room, through an archway and two steps up from the living room, is a grand space for entertaining, accommodating as many as 14 around the antique table plus providing space for an intimate dinner by its bay window. A large antique mirror, a personal favorite of Margaret's, was hung on the wall opposite the windows to capture the reflected light.

But the heart of the house is the fireplace in the new library. "Margaret had seen a photograph of a fireplace with a Gothic ▶

