

# OLD HOUSE, NEW TRICKS

## NEW ORLEANS CHARM WITH MODERN SENSIBILITY

BY KATY DANOS | PHOTOS BY JAMES GAFFEY

When Meredith and Michael Pinkerton bought their hundred-year-old Uptown home in 2004, they were both working attorneys with a toddler daughter, Hadley. Fast forward a little more than a decade and Meredith is a stay-at-home mother with a teenager and 9-year-old triplets — Will, Mary Avery and CeCe — and Michael is the co-founder and general counsel of ModSquad, an uber-cool global social media services company. The house, which started life as a double, had been converted to a single decades ago. But double staircases, double halls and a terribly choppy floor plan remained. There were lots of small rooms and wasted space, but no room large enough for them to all hang out together and no real pantry or laundry room — a “no go” for this busy family of six and their pet dog, Lilly. They didn’t want to leave their great neighborhood near Dancel Park and the house had plenty of square footage. It just needed to be reconfigured. So in 2015, they embarked on a major renovation that brought the graceful old bones up to modern day living.

Design-savvy Meredith wanted a high-functioning first floor with an open layout for the kitchen, breakfast room and family room — the rooms where it happens. Their home is definitely the neighborhood hub with kids running in and out to set up lemonade stands, grab snacks,

and jump on the backyard trampoline. They also wanted a cozy den away from the action for what she jokingly calls “adult viewing” and an easy flow to the dining room and her office. Both Pinkertons despise clutter and love clean, light and bright rooms that are family friendly, hardworking, and traditional with a kick. Meredith, laser focused with a fantastic eye for detail, based every design decision on what it would bring to that end goal. The results are a sophisticated mix of wonderful old New Orleans charm with a modern sensibility.

Meredith fell hard for a glossy black enamel Le Corbusier range which inspired the overall kitchen design and established the classic black and white palette. The hand-crafted European stove, as timeless as it is elegant, delivers high wattage drama while strategically planned cabinets with tons of storage provide sleek organization. Meredith has a place for everything and everything has a place. She smiles big and with a knowing look says “and everyone knows exactly where those designated places are!” Carrara marble countertops with beautiful gray veining and a ceramic subway tile back splash with gray grout bounce light around the room and amp up the glamour. It’s super chic and unfussy and when asked how she keeps it so streamlined, she says “don’t go upstairs. The kids pretty much



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have free reign.” The entire first floor — moldings, ceilings and all — got a new soft coat of Simply White paint by Benjamin Moore, a shade with “barely there” grey-blue undertones that captures light in lovely ways throughout the day. The beautiful original floors were redone with reclaimed wood as needed.

Yes: You can mix your metals and Meredith does so with panache. Brushed brass, the metal of the moment, shows up with a burnished glow on drawer pulls, knobs and lighting while the the polished nickel farmhouse sink hardware, stainless steel Sub-Zero fridge and antique copper pots Meredith collects, all live well together.

The next step was to tie the black and white kitchen to the rest of the house and interior designer Caroline Robert, owner of the stylish Magazine Street shop Perch, was just the person for the job. She selected a contemporary black and white geometric wallpaper for the accent wall that houses a breakfast area and small desk. It brings an energetic retro statement to the space and is the perfect counterpoint for the Old World stove. Caroline suggested the wavy black Kartell Masters barstools for a mid-century nod and the clear glass pendant lights with a contempo-



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rary feel. "I love the way light reflects off of all the surfaces and finishes. And the chairs are so comfortable and low maintenance. I just wipe them down. They're plastic after all," Meredith explains.

For the family room, a large white slipcovered sectional from Perch and a simple Lucite coffee table from West Elm continue the streamlined look. "The sofa is usually covered with kids, their friends and Lilly," Meredith continues to describe her usual scene. A black karaoke machine sits next to the white media cabinet and large flat screen television. "My friends asked me if I was nuts when I chose white with four kids and a dog, but this is so easy to clean. It's Sunbrella outdoor fabric that's washable. I can even use bleach," says Meredith in her calm, down-to-earth way. Custom white linen drapery with a simple black banded border dress the windows and were made in Caroline's new studio, New Orleans Dry Goods. Caroline even used

outdoor fabric on the zesty turquoise pillows. A very warm and casual feel runs throughout the house — bare floors with great patina and the occasional sisal or seagrass rug underfoot. Meredith says with a laugh, "we're not ready yet for grown-up rugs. I order these on Amazon and they can handle a lot!"

The black and white palette continues in the dining room, just a few steps from the kitchen. The old brick fireplace and firebox received fresh coats of glossy white or black paint. The dining room table belonged to Meredith's parents and it made the cut "because it has several leaves and was the perfect size for the room," she explains. The basic brown wood table got a total makeover with custom chalky blue paint and a few gold accents and Caroline found the lovely set of traditional French chairs. A contemporary painting and a sassy Austrian crystal chandelier that Meredith found years ago keep the mood vibrant and light. A

mix of accessories — blue and white porcelain urns, simple cache pots and a touch of gold leaf here and there — are kept to a happy minimum that Meredith changes now and then as she collects things she loves.

The Pinkertons kept the original old pocket doors that now divide the den and her office. Meredith's office or "lady parlor" as Caroline calls it (in a sincerely southern and totally serious way that she can pull off), features a grey and ivory Chinoiserie wallpaper with hints of a metallic that hovers between silver and pearl. Right off of the foyer, the small room is one of the very first you see. The classic pattern lends an air of formality and opulence that transforms the humble room with just a few rolls of paper. Unfinished wood is a beautiful and organic backdrop for each room and for the den Caroline worked around the great peacock blue velvet sofa Meredith owned and loved. Simple icy blue faux silk drapes pick up the subtle sheen in the velvet and lightens the feel in the room. Silk is a fragile fabric in the New Orleans sun, so faux and fabulous fit right into Meredith's way of thinking. Contemporary art, a striking zebra rug and pillows with personality finish the décor in this TV room that she and Michael use a lot.

It's apparent the family loves their home and that Meredith loves the design process — research, ideas and details. She clearly knows the little things matter and how they add up to establish the overall vibe in the house. She definitely has a confident design attitude about when to splurge on the "wow" factor and how to weave more practical price points into her decoration scheme. She's smart. The powder room, for example, gets a piecey leopard print wallpaper, but that's only tiny square footage. By contrast, the family room media cabinet is from Ikea and the ceiling fan, a must with all those windows, is the simplest style available at Home Depot. The color story is dialed back, but the natural materials and warm gold accents in hardware, curtain rods and door knobs act as color highlights that are rich and welcoming.

As in many old New Orleans houses, storage and closets are an organizational luxury usually in short supply. With the Pinkertons' renovation, that luxury exists in spades. "You want to see my utility closet?" asks Meredith with a grin. "Who would think a pantry and place to hide the microwave could make a person this happy! And my Bosch dishwasher with a third shelf? Totally awesome."



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