



Romancing THE HOME

A Virginia family's house brims with inherited heirlooms and fresh furnishings.

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“**T**O ME, HOME IS WHERE the story of life takes place,” says interior designer Alex Deringer. She and her business partner, Courtney Cox, started the decorating firm by Lane Living and, with it, home design and accessories boutiques in the heart of Old Town, Alexandria, Virginia.

Not that long ago, Alex fell in love with a 1912 farmhouse and its two-acre parcel of land in the city of Alexandria. It was perfect, not just for its prime location, but for her growing family. She is married with three children. Her life for the next few years was consumed with making the farmhouse into a home.

“We kept the footprint of the front rooms—the foyer, the parlor, the library and the kitchen—but gutted the rest and added on extensively to the back,” recalls Alex.





She worked with McLean-based architect Thomas French and local landscape designer Stuanne Fyffe to build a seamless indoor-outdoor connection, where the new dining room, with sparkling glass all around, and added-on family room, with its rustic beamed ceiling and French doors, open onto a beautifully landscaped garden. Above, a master bedroom and bathroom suite took form. Case openings throughout were enlarged or created for optimal flow for the active family and for entertaining.

Alex then began her decorating, with the overall approach that "layering within a house is what makes it a home, all those stories and mementos, chronicling your family history."

Both Alex and her husband had inherited lots of antique furnishings: larger pieces of furniture like the corner cupboard in the dining room, as well as smaller items like silver, porcelain and art. For Alex, the key was to use these meaningful elements without letting her space feel super-traditional or fussy. "I mixed in

Above: Silk window treatments filter sunlight in the slightly formal room. An antique sideboard in the dining room, which is open to the family room and butler's pantry, holds a collection of both heirloom and new plates, vases and ginger jars.

Left: Heirloom silver and china are casually stacked.



contemporary pieces where I could," she says.

The resulting home has a soft powdery palette of blue, oat and cream punctuated with some warmer hues, with plenty of metallic and mirrored accents, such as a trellis wallpaper with sheen and a gold gilt picture frame. The look is tailored and transitional, yet romantic, with ties to times gone by.

"My master suite is the most intimate and romantic place in my home," says Alex. "I know that sounds a bit clichéd. But this room changes with the seasons the most since it's perched three stories high, like a treehouse with a bird's-eye view. I have furniture specifically placed to enjoy the splendor of the seasons and romanticize about life past, present and future. From this vantage point, things look brighter. It's truly my happy place!"

Alex's Heirloom Tips

Working with family heirlooms while keeping things fresh is something Alex does very well. Bring her style home with these helpful hints:

1. **USE CONTEMPORARY LIGHTING:** Think sconces, chandeliers, as well as table and standing lamps.
2. **INSTEAD OF SETTING A FANCY FORMAL TABLE,** stack and layer fine china and antique silverware for parties.
3. **DON'T USE DOILIES OR TABLECLOTHS.** Instead, try runners or use bare tabletops.
4. **MIX IN NEWER PIECES** with a collection of older items like blue-and-white porcelain.
5. **HANG CONTEMPORARY ART** along with old gilt-framed paintings.
6. **KEEP UPHOLSTERED PIECES** to balance antique wood pieces.
7. **ACCENT WITH LAYERED PILLOWS** in contemporary textures, colors and patterns.
8. **NEW CARPETS AND FRESH PAINT COLORS PACK A PUNCH.** Be transitional in your overall approach, not traditional.
9. **JUXTAPOSE NEW AND OLD FURNISHINGS,** such as a new umbrella stand or modern art with an antique chest in a foyer.



Above: Freshly upholstered and slipcovered dining chairs pair well with an antique dining table and a pair of corner cabinets handed down through the family.

Left: A pretty gold bar cart holds vintage martini shakers and glass champagne buckets as well as a vase of pink roses.



A crisp-painted white kitchen has a cutout opening into the butter's pantry. The dining room lies beyond. The kitchen backsplash is antique-mirrored for a hint of glamour.



The new master bedroom also has a beautiful vaulted ceiling and plaid silk curtains, as well as a glamorous circle-design mirrored standing lamp and a comfortable armchair for lounging.

Other sophisticated-casual spaces in the home include the much-used family room, with its built-in study desks and bookshelves for the children, many seating options, fireplace and French doors that let in lots of light and fresh air.

"My house always keeps evolving," adds Alex. "I like to switch out texture, color and pattern in home accents with the seasons. I find it's more interesting for my own family and the friends that we invite to share in our lives."



Right: A drum-frame chandelier is a modern element in the foyer, which has an antique chest of drawers serving as an entry table.



Opposite: A trellis-patterned carpet, a large potted plant, and a bank of French doors and windows bring an outdoors element into the charming "treehouse" bedroom with a balcony.

Left: The master bathroom has a beautiful dressing table for Alex to one side, where she keeps her makeup and jewelry.



For more on Alex, visit
ivylearning.com.