



# BY THE BOOK

Laura U Interior Design and a busy family of six all turn to the same page when it comes to designing their new nest.

*By Michele Meyer // Photography by Michael Hunter Photography*

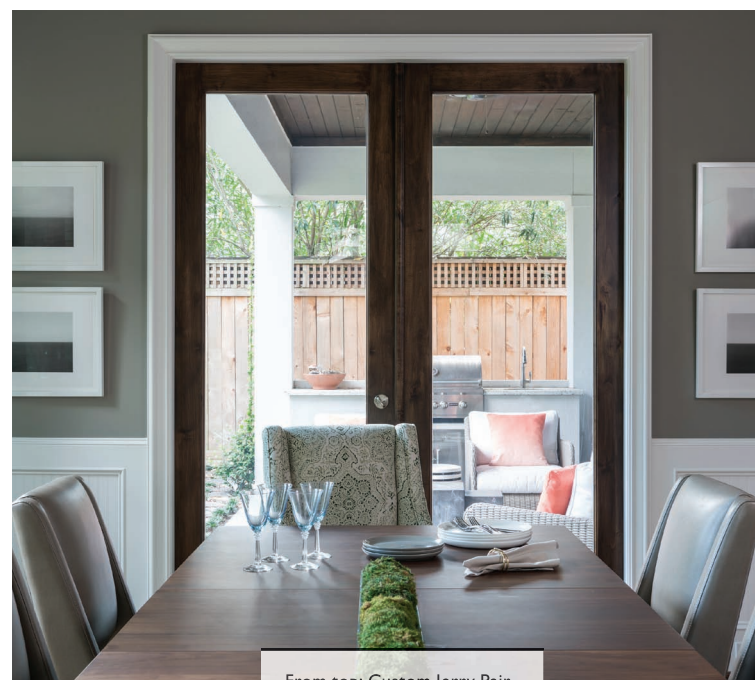
Call it courtship by computer. Strangers plunging into a lengthy union of an interior nature. After purchasing a 4,844-square-foot spec house in Southside Place for their rapidly expanding family—now four tots under 5 years old—attorney Bart Fehr and his wife, Lindsay, cruised the web seeking a storybook partnership with like-minded interior designers to furnish it fully with a tasteful aesthetic that could stand up to the troop of tykes.

“We didn’t know any high-end designers, so I went on houzz.com,” Lindsay recalls. “Bart and I gravitate to clean lines, neutral walls, powerful pops of color, and a mix of midcentury and contemporary furnishings—

and Laura U Interior Design kept showing up in my searches.”

Not only did that firm share the family’s aesthetic for their four-bedroom, 5 ½-bath house, but also, like the Fehrs, Laura U founder Laura Umansky has twin toddlers and a full house. She and lead designer Shannon Smith understood the family’s need for a home not only beautiful, but also safe and comfortable for children.

“We love that they had a direction. Our job was to help them edit and refine it,” says Umansky, who launched her firm in 2006 and has since worked on residences from Houston and Aspen to Soho and Carmel. To gain insight, Umansky asked Bart to join



From top: Custom Jerry Pair leather ottomans and sofas in the downstairs living room are low enough for kids to climb aboard and long enough for 6-foot-5 Bart to repose comfortably; the large dining room table seats 12.





Lindsay on Pinterest, where each could post anything they loved without influencing the other. “Clients often reveal more about themselves than they realize. We saw he was very into midcentury modern while she was more bohemian, and loved green and patterns.”

The resulting home is sensibly sleek, with a dash of quirk. Child-friendly features include wipe-down, stain-resistant dining chairs, ottomans and Duralac velvet reupholstered chairs. “This is our children’s home too,” Lindsay says. “We wanted something to be lived in, where things are spilled on and climbed on.” And the kids do climb, especially on a custom ottoman in the upstairs play and media room, she says. “They can sprawl and watch movies, and it’s the perfect height for them to hold on to and walk around.” Should children leap or tumble, a 400-square-foot, 300-pound rug cushions even “scary” falls. “It took four guys to carry it upstairs; none of them were happy.”

As in any relationship, the Fehrs and the firm needed patience, compromise and trust. “At first, I was nervous because we picked everything through pictures and I didn’t see any of it in person,” Bart says. “But they had a handle on what we like.”

While all agreed the original light fixtures needed replacing, it took multiple tries for the couple and designers to find the perfect chandeliers in the entry and alcove.

“We don’t like to do a lot of matchy-matchy,” says Umansky. “We want everything to be singular and thoughtful, as if it’s been collected over time.” After four proposals, the couple “finally settled on the very first ones they suggested,” Lindsay says. “The mismatched chandeliers are among my favorite things.”

Artwork, acquired during the project, would ultimately drive the home’s color palette, and art advisor Katharine Bowdoin Barthelme of Bowdoin Art Advising and Special Projects helped find fitting abstract and surrealist paintings. “Every time we got a new piece, we’d show it to Laura, and they’d incorporate it,” Bart says. “They also did a great job of making each room distinct.”

Laura U sees homes as novels, flowing from chapter to chapter with consistent characters. So malachite-green curtains in the dining room match velvet chairs in the family room, while pops of pumpkin and indigo migrate from hall to office to master bedroom. “Lovely, whimsical and glamorous surprises are in the space beneath the staircase,” Lindsay says of the abstract painting, pumpkin-velvet chair and cylindrical table. “That’s where I struggle to get shoes on the kids and where they go when we play hide-and-seek.”

By last Thanksgiving, the family had found their happy ending. How happy? As Lindsay says, “We’re so happy, I don’t think Bart has logged on Pinterest since.” ■



Clockwise from top left: The master bedroom has pops of pumpkin and indigo; a midcentury-modern desk and Eames chair for Lindsay; a built-in wall in Bart’s office houses his collection of first-edition American 20th century literature; “Lovely, whimsical and glamorous surprises are in the space beneath the staircase,” Lindsay says of the abstract painting and pumpkin velvet chair.

