Timeless Home

Traditional fabrics, dressmaker details, and soothing colors combine with antiques and comfy furnishings to turn this stately new house into an inviting home.

photographer Gordon Beall *field editor* Sandra L. Mohlmann



Designer Mark Phelps used cream instead of white for the woodwork in Libba and Brett Rule's house to soften the newness. For interest, he painted the living room ceiling a pale blue and striated the neutral cream walls with an umber glaze.

Shiny and new but far from cozy,

the walls in Libba and Brett Rule's new Charlotte, North Carolina, home cried out for a little patina. Although Libba is a traditionalist to the core, she didn't want the solution to involve anything too stuffy or frilly. In fact, she wanted to lighten the tone of the family antiques she and Brett owned to create a home more suitable for the couple's three young children, who are all younger than 12. "I tend to choose very traditional things," Libba says. "But I wanted a younger look."

Enter interior designer Mark Phelps, who is known for his fresh take on tailored traditional style. He attacked the house's newness on several fronts. First, he picked a neutral palette for the walls, adding soothing accents of garden-inspired colors in the window treatments, fabrics, and carpets. Starting with Libba's favorite color—a Wedgwood blue with gray undertones—in the living room and master bedroom, Phelps added shades of corn silk, olive green, and soft pink as he worked his way through the house. An area rug, originally belonging to Libba's mother, in the family room inspired the color palette.



To enhance the patina of age, many of the walls are lightly glazed and the doors are painted a bronze hue. Phelps framed the new color scheme with crisp window treatments, using sumptuous fabrics adorned with dressmaker details to lend formality without fuss. "I don't do much with top treatments," Phelps says. "I like trim and contrast—a solid color down the lead edge, for example. And I favor goblet-pleat treatments. Adding buttons is a casual touch, made elegant by covering them."

Phelps followed his up-to-date but not uptight design approach in his furniture selections, too. He paired the Rule's French and English antiques with more comfortable pieces designed for lounging, and used luxurious but easy-care chenilles for the new upholstery. To increase formality and achieve the traditional look so important to Libba without sacrificing livability, Phelps also aligned furniture in symmetrical arrangements. Then he sprinkled her exquisite porcelain collection throughout the house as artwork. "There are no rooms that are not approachable," Phelps says.

Take the living room, which was once so stiff the Rules never used it—not even for guests. Now a relaxed sofa and two club chairs, which are trimmed with twisted cord braid, make it a favorite family destination that's formal enough for entertaining. "We play games with the kids, we read, and even nap there," Libba says.

Elsewhere the children's things are neatly stored away but always close at hand: Homework supplies are tucked into the family room sideboard, near a table often used for projects; books hide in the drawers of the coffee table. It's all proof that coziness and elegance can come together to fashion a formal, family-friendly home.



This photo: The English-style dining table dating from the 1920s was handed down from Libba's grandmother. Phelps had it refinished and aged. **Opposite:** Located in one of Charlotte, North Carolina's, oldest neighborhoods, the Rules' house features a Low Country architectural style to help it blend in.



Opposite: Inverted box pleats banded with an informal taupe-and-cream check allow the toile valance in the breakfast area to strike a balance between casual and elegant. **This photo:** The draperies, in a light pink toile, are the main color accent in the otherwise neutral family room.





"We worked with formal pieces but kept it soft and comfy."
—DESIGNER MARK PHELPS



Opposite: "I didn't want anything too frilly," Libba says of the master bedroom. Phelps delivered by setting cool blue-and-green checked, plaid, and vine-pattern fabrics against soft yellow walls to create an unfussy, restful retreat. **Above:** Mahogany hues on this side table and armchair, along with the impressive four-poster, help ground the bedroom's light color scheme while introducing a decidedly traditional flavor.