Graceful Elegance

Designer Mark Phelps revives a tired Charlotte home with his signature approach to traditional style—tailored, uncluttered, and undeniably pretty.

photographer Gordon Beall *field editor* Sandra L. Mohlmann



To balance the masculine overtones of the striped wallpaper and dark wood in the dining room, designer Mark Phelps added petite pleated skirts to the chairs. An Aubusson rug placed on top of the sea-grass carpet also adds a feminine touch.



This photo: An array of silver mint-julep cups sparkles atop a circa-1830 English bowfront chest in the dining room. **Opposite:** The classic architecture of Louise and John Andrews' new front doors sets the tone for the understated interiors within.

Knowing when to stop decorating

is just as important as knowing what to decorate with, in designer Mark Phelps' opinion. He doesn't believe window treatments need to puddle to the point of distraction or shroud a room in darkness to be classic and traditional. Likewise, a home can exude a formal elegance without being stuffed with antiques. Phelps likes to take a few judicious pieces and mix them with tailored details to lend sophistication to a room without sacrificing practicality or comfort.

His fresh and eminently livable approach to design is on full display in Louise and John Andrews' Charlotte, North Carolina, home. The couple was working with Phelps on plans for another house when this one came on the market. Phelps' plan for genteel and charming rooms tempered with cushy, casual pieces was perfect for the young family of four. "From our first meeting, Mark listened to us and instinctively understood who we were, how we live, and what we wanted," Louise says.

An ambitious renovation, which included bumping out the roof and raising the ceilings 1½ feet in the main living spaces, put the plan in motion. Phelps also added an upstairs playroom for the children, which allowed him to give the living room a more formal tone. New larger doorways, framed openings, and a pair of symmetrical archways opened up the entire house but also created new challenges.

"You have to walk through the middle of the living room to reach the dining room," Phelps says. To compensate, he created two conversation areas in the living room—an intimate ensemble near the fireplace and an open arrangement along the opposite wall. Then he used subtle changes of texture and color to lead the eye toward the dining room. He bathed both rooms in soothing hues of cream, caramel, taupe, sable, and biscuit, adding shades of aqua blue and soft chocolate for contrast. But he painted the living room ceiling aqua and papered the walls in the dining room instead of painting them. "Our goal was to let each room have a distinctive personality while creating a pleasing accord between the connected spaces," Phelps says. "The two rooms have harmony, yet each stands on its own."

A mix of French and English antiques combined with family pieces lends the rooms a collected-over-time look—a theme that is repeated in the master bedroom, where a new mohair headboard is trimmed with antique nailheads and paired with an antique French side chair and armoire. Throughout the house, Phelps uses symmetrical groupings of accent pieces, such as a pair of reading lamps and a collection of plates, to lend interest without a lot of fuss. After all, for Phelps, success is in the balance.





"Although I love symmetry, I don't believe all pieces have to be the same size or shape. My advice is to be creative."

—DESIGNER MARK PHELPS





Opposite: In the living room, the formality of an antique English throne chair is softened by a high-back sofa and a contemporary cocktail table crafted from iron and limestone. Casual bamboo shades dress down the silk curtains. **Left:** Symmetry lends eye-pleasing balance to the collection of furnishings and accent pieces around the living room's fireplace. Phelps custom-designed the ottoman. **Below:** To draw the eye through the living room into the dining room without disrupting either room's rich tones, Phelps used neutral wide-striped wallpaper and silk plaid curtains. "They're classic yet lively," he says.





Opposite: Ending the day in this elegant master suite is a soothing prospect. A graphic floral print balances the traditional flavor of the pleated valance, and a tufted slipper chair introduces a touch of feminine appeal to counter the masculine mohair headboard. **Above:** A collection of English creamware plates surrounds an antique sconce, which hangs near a French side chair and a carved vintage French armoire.