

In this master bedroom, interior designer Mark Phelps had the walls painted a creamy yellow using a striating (dragging) technique that produces a textured look similar to that of silk wallpaper. Then the painters topped the walls with an umber-color glaze, which gives the surface a layered look.



on the sunny side.

splashed with a generous dose of yellow, two plain bedrooms get a light new look.

By Michelle Leise

- Photographer: Gordon Beall
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The owners of this 1960s two-story brick house in North Carolina paid interior designer Mark Phelps the ultimate compliment. After he showered their master bedroom with golden yellow, floral motifs, and pieces of porcelain, they hired him to decorate their entire house—including rooms that had been recently redone. "When I'm working with someone, it almost always becomes a personal relationship, and in this case, we worked together for two years," Phelps says. "I don't ever tell a person what to like or dislike—I just explain why something might look better to the eye."

That open attitude helps him design master bedrooms where both occupants feel comfortable. "In many cases, it can't be too feminine," Phelps says. That doesn't mean he shies away from florals and pastels. On the contrary, he says it's possible to use feminine touches as part of an extremely tailored look.

For instance, Phelps' idea of painting the walls of this master bedroom yellow initially gave the husband pause, but when he saw how it paired with the clean lines and soft color of the existing pine armoire, dresser, and side tables, he agreed it was the right choice. The bold green-leaf fabric, with hints of blue and yellow, on the draperies, slipper chair, and pillows reflects the couple's love of botanicals but is used without trims and tassels that would make it too fussy.

Above left: Every bedroom deserves an easy chair and reading lamp, Phelps says. These warm green and yellow tones pair well with an adjacent walnut-paneled den. **Left:** Clean lines on the draperies and chair ensure the fabric doesn't look too feminine or fussy. The only embellishments on the draperies are the covered buttons near the top that add a subtle yet finished look. **Opposite:** Phelps frequently uses porcelain plates as an artistic element on walls. "Antique plates are beautiful and graceful," he says. "I consider them art." The octagonal ones contrast in shape and style with the homeowners' botanical prints above the pine headboard.




Curved valances crown the twin beds and add subtle shape to the room.

Even the artwork above the bed is simple: Two framed botanicals from the owners' existing collection anchor a quintet of antique porcelain plates.

"I love getting people into a collection, whether it's porcelain plates or antique wooden boxes—whatever is old and special to you can become a collection," Phelps says. Displaying collections of sentimental value can be especially appropriate in a master bedroom, where you want to be surrounded by things that comfort you. But, he cautions, don't overdo. "I'm a big fan of editing. Just because you own it doesn't mean it has to be out," he says. "When you're in a room every night, you want it to be serene, a place without clutter where you can escape."

A guest room, he says, is the place to try a few more things that are unexpected. In the 11×11-foot guest room that these clients added at the opposite side of their house, Phelps coincidentally came back to yellow. This time, instead of paint, he chose a historically reproduced wallpaper, a bright yellow leaf arranged randomly. "We wanted this to be a sunny, bright bedroom, and this wallpaper was just the thing for it," Phelps says.

From there, he built a feeling of grandeur in the small space by choosing subtle fabrics that complement the patterned walls. Elegant bed hangings in a soft yellow-and-cream check frame the twin beds, complete with simple valances of taupe linen lined with yellow. Roman shades in a floral pattern are a pretty and sophisticated way to dress the windows without more draperies. And two unique painted dressers add drama.

"All this fabric and detail doesn't make the room seem smaller, just more elegant and grand," Phelps says. That's exactly what his clients think, so now Phelps' work here is done. He admits he'll miss the place a little, though. After two years, it almost feels like home.

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Opposite: Between the guest room's twin beds sits an early-19th-century French commode with the original paint. It's an ideal spot to display a piece of the owner's French yellow crockery collection. **Above right:** The English floral pattern on the pillow adds just the right amount of punch. **Below right:** After trying numerous dressers, Phelps finally decided this one from his own guest room would be perfect. The antique painted pine chest "is a little fun and unexpected," Phelps says. "I can always get something different for me—that's part of the fun."