



JUST LAST YEAR DEBBIE BAXTER WAS TASKED WITH THE CHALLENGE OF REVAMPING A MID-CENTURY HOME ONCE OWNED BY HER CLOSE FAMILY FRIENDS' PARENTS INTO A MODERN DWELLING THAT WOULD SUIT THEIR GROWN-UP LIFESTYLE NEARLY HALF A CENTURY LATER. COMBINING HER SIGNATURE FLAIR WITH HER SEASONED ABILITY TO MERGE COMFORT AND PRACTICALITY, BAXTER TRANSFORMED AN OUTDATED ONE-STORY HOUSE INTO AN INVITING SPACE THAT NOW BREATHES A SENSE OF EXCITEMENT INTO THE LIVES OF ITS NEW OWNERS. WHILE A DEPARTURE FROM THE MORE TRADITIONAL STYLE HER CLIENTS WERE USED TO, THE 2011 SAN ANTONIO REMODEL CREATED A PICTURE-PERFECT SPACE FOR A COUPLE WITH FOUR GROWN CHILDREN AND SEVEN GRANDDAUGHTERS WHO OFTEN FILL IT. BAXTER SAT DOWN WITH US TO SHARE SOME OF THE DESIGN DETAILS BEHIND THIS MODERN MAKEOVER.



This project has obvious significance since it was undertaken for one of your closest friends. What were the main goals driving this design?

DB: I've always been involved in the design of this couple's homes and offices, but it was always a very traditional style so this was a total design departure from what they were used to. It was an enormous change in their living style. They had to recalibrate their lives to go from a very traditional two-story cottage style where they had raised their four children to a one-story Mid-Century Modern on a large lot. My friend had only lived here for one year before going to college and getting married, but when her mother passed away and it came time to sell it, she just couldn't let go of the property. The main goal throughout the design was to keep the bones of the home. We wanted to change as little as possible to the structure but to update what was there. The only wall we removed was the one separating the dining and living areas from the kitchen. Previously, the kitchen was totally closed off, and removing the wall really created a sense of openness.



WHY THIS SPACE
WORKS

Designer Spotlight:
Debbie Baxter of Baxter Design Group

By MAURI ELBEL | Photography by CASEY DUNN



picking a rug — it's my first priority in a design. Then we found that vintage sectional and had it reupholstered in stone gray velveteen. We also found a vintage dining table, but we paired it with some reproduction chairs we had reupholstered in a very hip aqua fabric with a circular pattern. The white high gloss lacquered kitchen was our canvas to work from, and we kept the original white terrazzo floors. This enabled us to bring out the bold colors of the rug in eye-catching ways — like the fun citrus-colored backsplash and the functional, chic chartreuse bar in the kitchen.

What was the biggest challenge in recreating this space?

DB: The biggest challenge was the fact that this family had accumulated over 40 years of possessions, from Persian antique rugs, and English and French antique furniture to traditional oil paintings of family members, and crystal chandeliers. Those furnishings did not at all play into the architecture of the space so the real challenge at hand was to come to grips with detaching from all those items and starting over. They were able to give a lot of those pieces to their children who are building their own lives now, they donated others, and they also had an estate sale. They started a whole new and fresh approach to living as “senior citizens.”

Were you able to reuse any of the original elements in the redesign?

DB: As a whole, I would say this home is very green. We reused a lot in this redesign. Most of the furnishings you see are repurposed. Those are the original draperies we had cleaned and then repaired and resized. Even though we had to replace the doors and windows because they were almost 50 years old, the new steel windows and doors fit right back into the original openings.

You mentioned these clients have a big family — with some young members. Did you select your materials and furnishings to accommodate their lifestyle?

DB: Everything in this house is kid-proof because there are seven young granddaughters and more grandchildren to come. These homeowners are very active grandparents and it is not their style to micromanage — they are very relaxed. For example, we found the pair of vintage swivel chairs right here in San Antonio and had them reupholstered in tangerine indoor/outdoor fabric. Now the granddaughters can sit in them after they swim in the pool just outside the sliding glass doors. The octagonal coffee table was formerly brown stained wood that we found at a random vintage store and had it re-lacquered in white. We put white quartz on top so it is virtually indestructible.

Why does this space work?

DB: As two very modern-minded people past the age of 60, I knew they needed something to keep them inspired, active and loving every moment of life. And that is what this home has done. It has given a new lease on life to people who have raised their children and are of retirement age. It has a certain level of excitement. They were just so thrilled with everything that happened here. It totally works — for this family, and from a design standpoint. It works really, really well. And I am so inspired. ❖

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What was your source of inspiration for this design?

DB: If you look just over the fireplace, you will see a painting hanging there. That painting was done by my client's mother, and it was an original to this house. We loved it, and it became our inspiration for the entire design and color scheme. I think my favorite thing about this new space is the fact that we were able to find mostly vintage era furnishings from the 1960s, which was when the house was built. And we found vintage pieces of really fine quality; for example, the dining room chandelier is a vintage French chandelier from the same time period.

Speaking of color, how were you able to create this well-balanced space using such a bold and vibrant palette?

DB: White walls, white flooring and lots of glass required a strong color commitment to bring the interiors into focus. We started with the rug because the space needed a “wow” factor to anchor the furniture. I tend to work from the ground up and I always start by