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LIFESTYLE

Heights couple swap small bungalow for 4,000-square-foot Craftsman-style home



Diane Cowen, Staff writer

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Though the center of the home -- the family room, kitchen and breakfast area -- feels neutral, Gabe and Bridget have strong elements of red and blue.

Emily C. Butler

It's just a powder bathroom near the front of Gabe and Bridget Vick's Norhill home, but it embodies everything the couple loves about their house.

Cheerful blue-and-white wallpaper and a bright-coral-red vanity are what make this room the one that gets the most comments from visitors.

The couple -- attorneys who met as students at South Texas College of Law -- moved to the neighborhood when their lot had a 1,300-square-foot bungalow that seemed enough for the two of them. After their son Thomas was born, they realized they couldn't go much longer in a house that required Gabe and Thomas to share a closet.

They had already extensively remodeled that bungalow when they were contemplating adding on. Their architect, Greg Swedberg of [2Scale Architects](#), urged them to just start over rather than spend a lot of money on an already old house.

After five years in the Norhill neighborhood, the Vicks didn't want to move somewhere else, so they demolished the home and had their team design and build a nearly 4,000-square-foot Craftsman-style home that would fit into their neighborhood, surrounded by many older or historical homes.

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Fortunately for the Vicks, good friends had recently built a home that they loved, so they tapped into their team: Swedberg, [Whitestone Builders](#) for construction and [Emily C. Butler](#) for interior design work. Though the Vicks' custom home is plenty different from their friends' home, the two couples have the same taste and sensibility.

In October 2015, their old house came down, and by December 2016 they were moving back in. Butler, who lived in Houston and worked for Hines for several years, now lives and works in New York, where she launched her own interior design firm. She handles out-of-town clients like everyone else – with a few in-person visits and plenty of phone calls and emails.

“Both Gabe and Bridget are very busy with demanding jobs, so long-distance was easier because it took pressure off making time for in-person meetings,” Butler said. “I would use visual tools like putting together color and mood boards. I would send big packages of samples, and we'd talk about them over the phone.”

A major decision was the color palette.

“I've always been a big fan of color,” Butler said. “In Houston, homes that are bigger can absorb color without being too bold. The Vicks have navy blue and primary colors, but they didn't default to safe tones. They went with bold accents like the red vanity in the powder bath. At the end of the day, it's just paint, and if you get sick of it you can just paint it again.”

The front of the home has a formal living room, and opposite it is a dining room painted a soft melon color.

“We call it the green room,” Bridget said of the living room, where the walls are a pale green and the trim is slightly darker. A tan rug softens the hardwood floor, and a white sofa and chairs hold pops of other colors in decorative pillows.

During the holidays, this is where the Vicks put up their Christmas tree, and during the rest of the year they use it to chat with friends at dinner parties or for a quiet place to take work calls when the rest of the house is filled with the noise of their two young sons, Thomas, 5, and his 2-year-old brother, Harrison.

Bridget, 36, is a partner at the Hunton Andrews Kurth law firm downtown, and Gabe, 38, is a partner at Gray Reed McGraw in the Galleria area.

“I’m drawn to antiques and traditional style,” Bridget said of their home and neighborhood, and the couple love the Heights area because they can walk or bike with their children to parks, restaurants and other places.

So the home has some true antiques as well as vintage pieces, along with some things custom made to look old. There’s a vintage bamboo settee in the foyer and a couple of vintage side tables, too. In the family room, driftwood was transformed into a sturdy coffee table that can withstand anything their boys can dish out.

An advantage of adding a few vintage pieces is that they often come with lower price tags and plenty of character.

“Our favorite thing is to come home on Friday nights and park our cars in that garage and not get back into them until Monday morning when we go to work,” she said. “We do that, we really do. We walk the boys to the playground and then the ice cream store and back and wear them out.”

The dining room features a mix of things that feel old and new. The dark wood table is surrounded by eight cane chairs, and at one end of the room, a simple sideboard – the Franklin Sideboard from the [Ziggy](#) line of furniture that Butler recently launched – is painted a shiny blue. Custom draperies with a pretty tape trim on each panel’s leading edge frame the windows.

Butler likes to play with scale, and much of the lighting she advised the Vicks to use is oversized, such as the gold, six-light lantern that hangs over the dining table.

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Their initial reaction was predictable: “We said ‘whoa.’ Even our builder called us and said, ‘Is this the right size?’” Bridget said. “We just trusted Emily’s instinct.”

The room gets used for small dinner parties and family holiday dinners, but on a day-to-day basis it’s where Thomas can play with his puzzles and Legos without the disruptions of his little brother.

In the home’s center is the open family room, kitchen and breakfast area, where soft shades of red and blue create a comfortable vibe. The living room has a dark-blue sofa, a settee and armchairs, and soft reds come in the form of a pair of stools and in the prints on decorative pillows.

“I’ve always loved red, and I’ve always had hints of color around. My everyday dishes are Fiesta, in all the colors, and I’ve had that forever,” Bridget said. “I’ve always liked color, but I’ve been hesitant to decorate a home with it because I don’t have that skill.”

The island is painted blue, and white cabinets line an outer wall; red accents come in the runner between the island and the sink. Strands of red are woven into the Serena & Lilly rattan barstools at the island and the chairs at the nearby table.

A lot of family time happens in the kitchen, with the Vicks cooking and eating at home and enjoying their new Wolf range – especially the griddle component, which they use every day, for everything from pancakes and eggs to burgers and chicken.

Though a small guest room is on the first floor, the family’s bedrooms and a playroom for the boys are all upstairs. Thomas loves to read, so his room has a statement wall covered in wallpaper that looks like shelves of classic books. A reading nook has a comfortable settee, where he sits with at least one of his parents in the evening for a story before bed. Thomas’ room is next door, and he has dark-blue walls and twin beds for when Thomas wants to sleep there or for when any of their many cousins visit.

In their bungalow and temporary rental home, Thomas slept in a crib in a nursery, so during construction he got to visit his first big-boy room as a work in progress, commenting on every new step.

In the master suite, the Vicks opted for a vintage-style bed and a pair of dressers painted a deep coral, with a footboard bench in the same color. A campaign-style dresser from an antiques store brings a touch of “old” to the room.

Cool Cararra marble laid herringbone style covers the master bathroom floor, and an old-fashioned freestanding bathtub was installed to match the Craftsman-style era of the home. Now, Gabe and Bridget share a single large closet easily, and there was even room for a makeup vanity for Bridget.

The Vicks hadn't used an interior designer when they remodeled and furnished their bungalow and said that if they hadn't this time, they would have much less color and would never have chosen wallpaper for a single room.

"I remember thinking that the way it turned out is not exactly how I envisioned it," Gabe said. "It's better."

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