

Settling IN

A Nashville couple left their home in which they'd lived for years. They weathered life in a rental until the work in the new residence was done. They're not leaving again.

INTERIOR DESIGN BY *Ann Shipp and Roger Higgins*
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Opening page: Interior designer Roger Higgins created a special floor-to-ceiling shelving unit in his Nashville home for his collection of rare leatherbound books. A custom-designed and upholstered coffee table doubles as an ottoman. Opposite: The floor of the entry hall features a high gloss, which helps accentuate the antiques that include an English Regency table and mid-century Modern chairs. This page: A living room wall is animated with three wallpaper panels depicting birds in flight.



Lee Industries' Brewster Natural chairs are grouped around the dining table, each of which is accented with Bullion trim from Samuel & Sons. The lighting fixture over the table is a multi-arm Dennis & Leen crystal chandelier. The artwork is by the homeowner and designer, Roger Higgins.



This page: In the master bedroom, an antique French Baroque console functions as a convenient tabletop. The bed and its velvet mohair covering are from Bernhardt. Opposite: A floral motif wallpaper is used in an upstairs guest bathroom; a tall antique mirror is centered over a multi-drawered vanity.



NOT LONG AFTER designer Roger Higgins finished the interiors of his home in the West End neighborhood of Nashville, he and his wife, Ann Shipp, decided to sell. “The house had been featured in a magazine, and a reader who saw it called a real estate agent with an offer to buy,” says Higgins. Even though they had nowhere to go, the industrious couple found a new home—a 1950s ranch—in Belle Meade, a lovely city in Tennessee known for its historic architecture and equestrian legacy. The home needed plenty of work, but the location was ideal, and they knew they could transform it into a comfortable dwelling for themselves and their two dogs, Birdie and Lily. So they purchased it on the spot and later signed a lease on an (unfortunately uncomfortable) rental house nearby, where they planned to situate themselves until the work on their new home was complete.

In addition to its coveted location, their new compact single-story home featured an ample entrance hall and a beautiful, glazed terracotta tile floor in the enclosed porch—but not an abundance of other attributes. Belle Meade may be one of the region’s most attractive places, and, in part, it remains so because of the town’s many building restrictions on alterations. However, with the help of architect Steve Durden, Higgins pressed on and secured approval to add another story that would double the residence’s size. Durden also transformed the spaces within the original footprint to make the home more conducive to modern living and incorporated architectural features that brought newfound character to the previously lackluster interiors.

Before beginning any of their own home improvement projects, Higgins and Shipp always craft a wish list together. In this case, Shipp’s desires were few, though they were both hoping that the two-year-long restoration might be shorter. “I really wanted a large, comfortable room where we would spend most of our time; a big screened-in porch that would open to the outside; an expansive pantry in the kitchen; and a pretty wallpaper—which Roger indulged me with in my own bath, even though he hates girly things,” she says. “Other than that, I wanted this house to be his baby.”

With that, Higgins started by reconfiguring the home and converting the former enclosed porch with the blue-green tile floor into the large library/den that has become the couple’s primary living space. “I saw a curved ceiling in a bistro on Portobello Road in London that I replicated here

by bumping up and vaulting the ceiling and covering it with white-oak floorboards, complete with knots and holes,” says Higgins. The inspiration for the space, and indeed the rest of the home, was sparked by both the color of the original glazed tiles and Higgins’s collection of rare leatherbound Dutch books, which are stored in newly built bookcases that flank the fireplace in the room. “The millwork and walls were painted to match the color of the patterned tiles; that hue, along with the color and texture of the books, heavily influenced the palette of the entire house,” he explains.

Higgins transformed the three small ground-floor bedrooms into an expansive master suite, a powder room, and a wet bar. He also designed a screened-in porch that leads to the backyard, where new hardscaping and plantings—all developed with landscape architect Isaac Wantland—form an ideal setting for the many outdoor parties the couple hosts. And in a corner on the lower level, the designer carved out a stairwell that leads to the upper level, which houses three new ensuite bedrooms, a sitting area, and a laundry space.

Once the addition and renovation were complete, Higgins turned toward decorating the rooms with a thoughtful mix of new furnishings and antiques (some selected from his own collection, others purchased at auction or antiques markets) including a Biedermeier chest and an English Regency table in the entrance hall, a Louis XVI-style sideboard in the dining room, and a French Baroque console in the master bedroom. “I do love old furniture, but I also believe in comfortable chairs,” says the designer, who also included new upholstered pieces in the dining and formal living rooms. A few glistening antique crystal chandeliers, along with some quirky vintage and contemporary art and objects—including a triptych of hand-painted de Gournay wallpaper panels, 3-D models from a French art school, and a piece Higgins splashed on a stretched canvas himself—complete the mix.

Now that Higgins and Shipp have settled comfortably into their home and the dogs are happy, too, would the couple ever consider moving again and starting anew on another project? Higgins says, “I’ll be staying right here. A lot of heart and soul went into everything we did—we went headlong into it.” ■

“Old books and antiques fascinate me—their warmth and patina bring texture to a room,” says Roger Higgins.

“The more beautifully designed the space, the less décor it needs.”

—Roger Higgins

