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PERSONAL BEST

ARCHITECT JAMES CARTER CREATES A NEW HOME FOR HIMSELF BUILT SPECIALLY FOR A LIFETIME'S WORTH OF CHERISHED COLLECTIONS.

INTERIOR DESIGN BY JANE HAWKINS HOKE | ARCHITECTURE BY JAMES CARTER
LANDSCAPE DESIGN BY NORMAN KENT JOHNSON | PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANNIE SCHLECHTER
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Antique oak paneling gives this Birmingham library a warm, weathered look. Regency armchair in a Rose Tarlow Melrose House fabric; lamps, Christopher Spitzmuller; Georgian consoles; antique Italian armillary sphere, Amy Perlin Antiques; rug, Hiltz Lauber.
OPPOSITE: The exterior of the house is a combination of whitewashed brick and wood painted in Benjamin Moore's Glacier White; shutters in Duxbury Gray, Benjamin Moore.





IN 2000, ARCHITECT JAMES CARTER BOUGHT A PIECE OF PROPERTY in the leafy Birmingham community of Mountain Brook with the intention of tearing down the postwar cottage that sat on it and building his “forever” house. Typically, life got in the way. “I got too busy, then I didn’t know exactly what I wanted, then the economy tanked,” he says. At long last, in 2013, he scrapped the original, started from scratch, and moved in two years later.

The wait turned out to be a gift to the project. For one thing, Carter, who lived in the cottage in the interim, had plenty of time to figure out how to situate the new structure on the lot, which is especially narrow and deep. “For clients, I often do a jewel on a hill, but this property demanded something more intimate that also fit into the neighborhood,” he explains. “I wanted it to be a bit rambling. I wanted quirks. I wanted personality.” The resulting brick Georgian looks as though it might have grown up from the space ages ago—an effect enhanced by the soft whitewash on the brick exterior and the reclaimed-slate roof. In the end, Carter

more than achieved the “easy grace” he was after: “It’s not, ‘Oh, look at me, I’m so special.’”

Carter began collecting for his “permanent nest” 25 years ago, which meant the interiors, too, were instantly layered. The octagonal dining room was sized to fit an Italian screen purchased years earlier, while the hallway to the master bedroom is hung with Neapolitan gouaches that currently number a whopping 27. “I love the vivid blue and the fact that they’re so light and happy,” he says.

To help with the mix, Carter enlisted close friend Jane Hawkins Hoke, a Birmingham designer and longtime collaborator whom he calls his “safety net and guiding spirit.” When he wanted to do the dining room walls in lacquered orange, his favorite color, she talked him into apricot instead, and he was glad. “I wanted it bold but not cartoonish,” he says. When Hoke was a tiny bit horrified by the gilded William Kent consoles in the paneled library, in which the other pieces are more organic, Carter prevailed. “Almost every magazine page I tore out featured rooms with eagle consoles.”