

Light and Day

An Uptown villa glimmers with sunny interiors and sumptuous surfaces.

By Melanie Warner Spencer / Photographed by Sara Essex Bradley / Styled by Valorie Hart





In 1922, architect Leon C. Weiss, of Weiss, Dreyfous and Seiferth – known for the Art Deco-style Louisiana State Capitol building in Baton Rouge – finished a sunlight-flooded, stone, Mediterranean-style villa near Audubon Park. Windows dominate the columned exterior of the striking house, which is elegantly topped with a red clay tile roof. The current owners admired it for years, whether visiting friends whose relatives owned it or passing by when running errands in the neighborhood. While the formerly formal and jewel-toned interior now is awash in shades of cream and white, it's easy when relaxing in the cozy solarium off of the expansive living room, to imagine the home's Jazz Age beginnings, with fashionable couples chitchatting and clinking Champagne coupes as they filter out the French doors onto the front veranda with piano music wafting through the night air. Easy entertaining is as much a part of the life of the house as it may have ever been, which is one of the many attributes that drew the current owners to the six-bedroom manse.

Top: After living in the house for five years, the owners worked with local designer Rivers Spencer to finish the interiors.

Bottom: A painting by Kevin Gillentine is one of the choice additions to the owners of a Mediterranean-style villa designed by Leon C. Weiss of Weiss, Dreyfous and Seiferth in 1922. The firm also designed the Louisiana State Capitol in Baton Rouge and the Granada Theatre and Pontchartrain Hotel in New Orleans.

Facing page: The sunny solarium overlooks a veranda and lawn and offers access to the front veranda. A flat-screened television is tucked discretely into the corner.





“I’ve always admired the exterior of the house,” says one of the owners, a local real estate lawyer. “The architecture; it’s classic.”

The first order of business after buying the house in 2005, was to hire interior painter Dennis Burke to brighten up the sapphire blue and ruby red tones on the walls with white throughout the rooms. Working from the third floor down, it took three months to brighten and whiten the surfaces. For the Venetian plaster in the foyer, the couple turned to decorative finish and restoration artist Diane Killeen, who counts the historic Roosevelt Hotel as one of her many clients.

“We knew when we walked into the kitchen that it had to be redone,” the owner says. The light oak cabinets and hand painted tile Italian tile backsplash would have to await a complete overhaul. “We painted the trim of the cabinets and refinished the top of the tiles. We knew it was just temporary.”

She also wanted to live in the house, to get a feel for the space.

“I realized it wasn’t functional,” she says. “There was no triangle. If you opened the refrigerator to make a

Top: Spencer had the owner’s grandparents’ wingback chairs reupholstered in plush lavender velvet for a fresh pop of color in the master bedroom.

Bottom: The couple worked with Artisan Kitchens & Bath to gut and redesign the kitchen, which features DCS by Fisher and Paykel Appliances.

Facing page: Wood floors and cabinets bring warmth to the all-white kitchen with ample storage throughout the room. Chartreuse drapes add some pizzazz to the room.





sandwich, you had to walk around the island to put the utensils in the dishwasher.”

Ultimately, the couple gutted the kitchen, working with Lorrie Adams at Artisan Kitchens & Bath to redesign the room with ultimate function in mind. Now, one side features all of the surface area and equipment needed for food prep and the other is outfitted as a wet bar. The wood floors are finished in white, as are the Berloni lacquered wood cabinets, and the couple outfitted the room with DCS by Fisher & Paykel appliances.

In 2013, the owners enlisted the help of designer Rivers Spencer to put the final touches on the interior. Working with a few key items in the couple’s existing collection of antiques, family heirlooms and artwork, the designer turned her eye toward the furnishings, floor coverings and artworks needed to create a collected, contemporary, yet restrained look with light and texture at the forefront, but which allows the understated architecture of this classic house to take center stage. ■

Top: A large-scale gold framed mirror in the dining room has moved with the couple through the home.

Bottom: The half-moon table and piano in the living room were also in the couple’s list of items to work into the new interior landscape. Faux fruit adds a festive, seasonal touch to the home.

Facing page: The dining room table and chairs are from Karla Katz Antiques on Magazine Street. The chandelier adds a touch of elegance in the clean, crisp room.

