



Stories Yet Untold

A HOUSTON HOME CELEBRATES
THE PAST AS IT INSPIRES
A YOUNG FAMILY TO WRITE
NEW CHAPTERS OF ITS OWN

WRITTEN BY SALLY FINDER WEEPIE
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JULIE SOEFER
STYLED BY JESSICA BRINKERT HOLTAM



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ld houses, like a time-honored bookstore or a labyrinthine curiosity shop, possess an almost gravitational pull, drawing us in to explore, to discover

their stories. Wouldn't it be magical if a 21st-century house, say a new build in Houston, could do the same?

"The concept from the start of this project was a new old house," designer Benjamin Johnston says. "From the architecture to the interior design, we wanted to create a home that feels simultaneously current and like it's been here for generations."

Johnston set a classic backdrop with paneled walls in some spaces, plaster in others, beamed ceilings, wood plank floors, and swaths of deeply veined marble.

"We leaned into materials that will age over time," the designer says. "The marble will stain and etch. The butcher-block countertop will be cut on and used. Unlacquered brass hardware will patina. Plaster walls will mottle with people's touch. These surfaces make room for life."

Even contemporary features, such as the steel-framed windows that stretch across the great-room, are rooted in the past, inspired by old factory buildings. They allow sunlight to pour in, shifting colors and mood across the hours.

"I did plaster walls in the great-room because the natural light plays with the surface so beautifully," Johnston says.

Library A Vladimir Kagan sofa throws a curve into this timeless wood-paneled retreat. **Great-room** Countertop-depth marble wrapped over a wood frame makes the fireplace look like it was cut from a single block of stone. **Previous pages** Durable rugs made of cowhide strips define two distinct gathering spots. Faux beams above the windows disguise motorized shades that provide light control and privacy.



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Dining room A wallcovering by Robert Crowder & Co. wraps the formal dining space. A dark-stained “Corso” credenza contrasts the light-tone “Mesa Pacific” dining table, both from Century Furniture. **Pantry** A library ladder ensures the homeowners can make full use of this storage space off the kitchen, where ceilings soar to 12 feet. A playful “Egg Drop Pendant” by Barry Dixon for Arteriors illuminates a work area.



Sprawling wood beams draw the eye up to a dramatic vaulted ceiling that emphasizes the room's airy atmosphere. To make the large room feel intimate, the designer delineated two seating groups, one for relaxed TV time and the other for cozy conversation next to a marble fireplace—the introduction to another of the home's stories.

“Pomogranit Stones in Houston brought in several varieties of Italian marble that hadn't been quarried in some time,” Johnston says. “The stone here and in the kitchen inspired the palette of off-white, cream, ecru, merlot, blue, green, and gold. Mother Nature always provides.”

Merlot splashes in the great-room repeat in the adjoining kitchen, where deep red ripples through marble backsplashes, countertops, and the hood crowning a Lacanche range.

Red also pops on counter stools, the breakfast table, and inside glass-front cabinets framed in sultry brass. Even the pantry pours on merlot, a backdrop for open shelves in built-ins slathered in the same rich blue as the kitchen cabinetry.

Blue takes a surprising character turn in the dining room

Kitchen Hits of “Merlot” appear inside cabinetry coated in “Granite Peak,” both from Sherwin-Williams. A craftsman used heartwood from a 300-year-old tree to create the butcher-block island countertop. “It recalls the romantic notion of an old house,” designer Benjamin Johnston says.



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on wallcovering with a marbled look inspired by endpapers of old books. “The homeowners spend a lot of time reading and learning as well as traveling,” Johnston says. “I wanted to explore what they find to be beautiful and interesting.”

Clean-lined furnishings and a wealth of texture—from luxe draperies, tufted leather, and warm wood—provide a calm foil to the paper’s energetic pattern.

When entertaining calls for a more casual mood, the game room awaits. Walls upholstered in elegant gray houndstooth tweed and leather, accented by brass nailhead trim, elevate the experience of watching the game, catching a movie, or cuing up a friendly game of pool.

On the other end of the home, the white oak-wrapped library beckons, ready for quiet conversation or curling up with a good book. Deep maroon veining in the fireplace stone plays off the tones of natural wood. “It’s a lighter, brighter take on the traditional study,” Johnston says.

Abundant shelves and pedestals spotlight the homeowners’ array of collected pieces: stone specimens, ceramics,

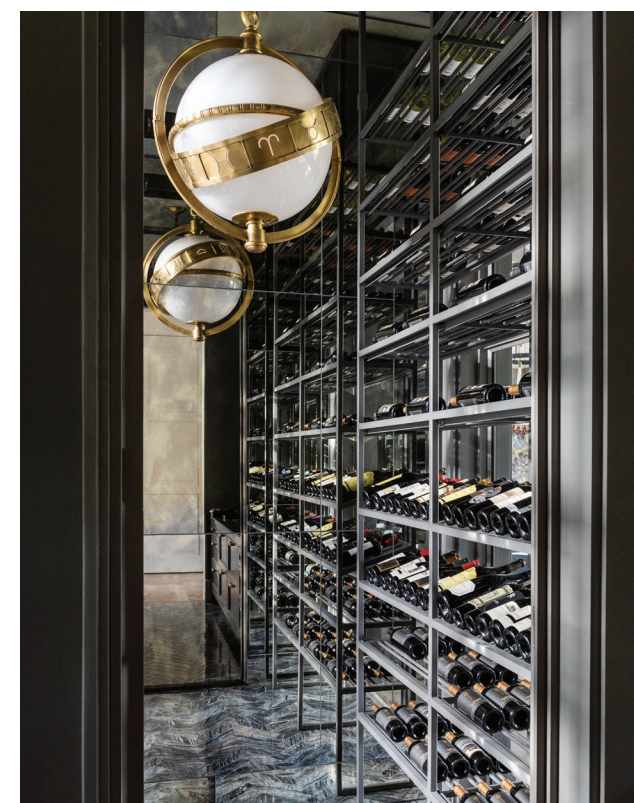
sculpture, and portraiture. “I love how these curiosities speak to their travels and give the house a feeling of being collected over time,” Johnston says.

Compelling stories also unfold in the home’s private spaces. A rug in the guest room, designed by Johnston as a fanciful, abstract take on tropical bird feathers, launches a palette of rich blues and greens that extends up the plaster walls to the coffered ceiling.

The primary bath delivers even more indulgence. A “runway” of natural stone leads to a pampering soaking tub, framed by steel-and-ribbed-glass doors that cloak the shower and a water closet. The mosaic pattern on the floor was created using two types of marble, one seen on wall cladding and the other tapped for countertops.

Breakfast area A “Gala” dining table in a custom color from Chaddock keeps the merlot story line flowing. A banquette repeats the table’s curve. **Game room** Sculptural “Ottimo Torchiere” floor lamps from RH stand sentry on each side of an abstract art piece in this sophisticated relaxation space. **Exterior** Slurried brick plays against a clay tile roof on the newly built Houston home.





Here and throughout the home, traditional materials and timeless architectural detail infuse a sense of history that serves as a prologue to new stories told by a young family—and their modern art, textiles, and furnishings. “It’s a house that will stay classic and fresh for years to come,” Johnston says. “It will age authentically with time. And the story will continue.”

Designer: Benjamin Johnston

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Staircase Walls wear a coat of deep blue—a color Johnston plucked from veins in the flooring, which looks like natural stone but is actually porcelain. “It’s not perfectly smooth,” he says. “The undulating finish creates a feeling that it was quarried long ago and walked on for centuries.” **Guest room** Inspired by a rug that he created for Madison Lily, Johnston had plaster in the guest space tinted the same blue-green. “The room didn’t have a good bed wall, so I floated the bed in the middle of the room,” he says. The dual-sided bed has a bookshelf on one side and a desk on the other. **Wine room** A dedicated space tiled in Silver Wave marble houses a treasure trove of vintages for the homeowners, who are avid wine enthusiasts.



Primary bath Symmetry reigns in the marble-clad bath space. Johnston used wall-mount fixtures to keep countertops clean. “I love the juxtaposition of the dark gunmetal finish with the light marble,” he says. Glass-and-steel enclosures echo the look of the home’s windows. [ff](#)