

THE *EAST* SIDE HOME OF MELA & ROAM'S COURTNEY BARTON



Courtney Barton, dressed in Mirth Caftans, with husband JJ and sons Dry and Theo in front of their 1946 Idylwood home.

For nearly a decade, friends and followers have looked to Courtney Barton for a fresh perspective on style. An early adopter of blogging, she founded her first website, *Inside the Loop*, in 2007 and led her readers on a decorating romp through a Heights bungalow. But it was in 2011, when she created Mela & Roam, that she generated thousands of followers who have turned into loyal customers, and she relocated her home and business to a spacious 1946-era family home in Houston's East Side.

As she shared tidbits about her decorating odyssey and her home fabric and furnishings created in India, readers flocked, including some who have since become friends, such as Erin Gates of *Elements of Style* (the blogger turned interior designer with a *New York Times* best-selling book) and Erika Powell of *Urban Grace Interiors* (the interior designer with a blog who turned into an Internet design star).

Barton majored in apparel design and textile science at LSU, then worked in New York in wholesale for Jill Stuart, then for designer Ralph Rucci. Her husband JJ's oil-and-gas job sent them to Malaysia in 2009; while living abroad, she fell in love with textiles. "I became obsessed with the people and their passion for their community's craft," says Barton, who found herself on an endless quest for fabrics. Asking locals for recommendations led her to a stockpile of antique

textiles in a neighbor's friend's cousin's basement. This fueled the fire.

In 2011, the couple moved back to Houston, where Barton leased a space at The Urban Market Design + Antique Show on a whim and officially started her business, Mela & Roam. Mela, a Hindi word for village fairs, is where communities gather to sell their wares; it also reminded Louisiana-reared Barton of the Cajun expression for "look at me." The word Roam represents her lack of a bricks-and-mortar shop as she travels to markets to sell her goods.

For the first Urban Market, she reached out to her contacts in India and had them rush products to her. She fashioned a quaint fabric rickshaw in lieu of a booth, and shoppers bought all of her textiles, including the ethnic-printed dohars she adored. Dohars, which range from baby to king size, are the ideal blanket for hot and humid Texas summers, as they're hand-loomed from ultra-lightweight 100

percent cotton. And she has never received more than two dohars in the same print.

After the rapid growth of her business and the birth of her second son, the family outgrew their Heights bungalow — and Barton longed for something different. Their search took them to Idylwood, a historic neighborhood east of downtown developed in the '30s. Surrounded by Brays Bayou, Gus Wortham Golf Course and the stunning Catholic convent Villa de Matel, the neighborhood is serene, with winding streets and some of the few rolling hills in Houston. Here they discovered the Holy Grail for a young family: a 2,630-square-foot home in a cute, close-in neighborhood with a big yard. The Georgian-style two-story house, built on a coveted double lot in 1946, needed some love, but the reasonable price enabled them to turn it into their dream home.

Barton's first order of business was to paint over the unflattering combo of red brick and blue-gray



In the dining room, a collection of tiffin containers (Indian lunch boxes) sets the tone. Custom dining table manufactured by Barton's factory in India, modeled after a 15-foot-long antique. Vintage leather chairs found at Urban Market. Clay chandelier by Mud Studio.



Barton's living room functions as a playroom for her young boys. Mela & Roam's Arabian Nights tent, Haitian folk art painting over the mantel. In front of the nonfunctioning fireplace, bowling pins are positioned in lieu of firewood.



Theo awakes from his morning nap in a Jenny Lind crib with custom Mela & Roam bedding.



Japanese carp flag found in Round Top hangs over antique beds in son Dry's room. The 1930s steel Simmons dresser was a gift from a client.

siding with a more cohesive, historic-looking shade, Pratt & Lambert's Feather Gray. She removed black shutters that obscured the unique brick pattern, added gas lanterns manufactured by a copper maker in Baton Rouge and removed ubiquitous sago palms. Inside, she took the interior down to its studs. While she left the footprint of the home largely unchanged, a more open layout, new doors and windows, and a new kitchen and bathrooms were all in order.

A strict palette of grays, blues and greens creates a backdrop for Barton's vibrant ethnic prints and textiles. Given her constant creative penchant, the design, textiles and paint colors are ever changing — her husband calls her a perpetual nester. Furnishings include family heirlooms and antiques from Round

Top to pieces imported from Asia. She will take an old chair with great lines, refinish it and add prized textiles. One Kings Lane took notice, and she occasionally sells her textile-upholstered furniture on the site.

Her inventory is housed in the garage along with a small office. While she currently sells online on her website melaandroam.com and locally at The Vintique Flea, Design Antiques Show Houston and various country club trunk shows, she also accepts appointments with clients in her home. Here, they can visualize the product mixed with traditional furniture and see how to assimilate it into their own home.

Visitors admire Barton's design concept for her oblong living room. Instead of filling it with stuffy formal furniture, she left it largely open as a playroom for her young boys. An Arabian Nights indoor play tent she created (and sells on her site) holds court in one corner, adjacent to a children's table for painting. A tin basket of bowling pins and balls replaces kindling in the nonfunctioning fireplace, ready to transform the room into a bowling alley. An Indian howdah (a carriage for the back of an elephant) serves as a daybed for naps after an afternoon filled with imagination.

Art is seamlessly integrated throughout. In the living room is an abstract painting from Alexis Walter, a friend from Louisiana; a mystical tree painting by



Barton's favorite artist, Rebecca Rebouché of New Orleans, makes a statement in the kitchen. Intriguing examples of Haitian folk art are in son Theo's nursery and above the mantel in the living room. Barton found the folk art at Urban Market years ago and has been searching for similar paintings ever since; she now regrets not buying every one the vendor had. A massive painting of a dog holding sausages makes kids and adults alike smile before they head upstairs — it was a gift from her friend Erika Powell after she completed the 2012 *Coastal Living* Beach House, which Barton outfitted in Mela & Roam linens.

Barton no longer maintains a blog — like many before her, she is now an Instagram convert. But she's grateful for the years she devoted to it, because not only did the blog create great friendships, but the sense of community it fostered gave her the confidence and the following she needed to make Mela & Roam a success.

Clockwise from top left:

The renovated master bath with shiplap walls, Carrera marble countertop and Hansgrohe faucets.

Barton and Theo in the family room with a pair of Lee Industries chaises under vintage Bollywood posters.

Barton fully renovated the kitchen with two-tone cabinets (lowers in Sherwin Williams Rosemary; uppers in Benjamin Moore Hazy Skies) and concrete counters with Tabarka Studio's hand-painted terra-cotta tile backsplash.

An Indian howdah with pillows made from old dowry bags serves as a daybed in the living room.

In the family room, Mela & Roam pillows and a framed Brazilian Rikbakta tribal headpiece.

Barton in Mirth Caftans. Cypress doors found in New Orleans.

Vintage typewriter acts as unexpected art when fashioned to the wall.

