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DESIGNING FROM THE GROUND UP

By marrying tastes and playing up architectural details, Cincinnati's Designs on Madison achieves sophisticated comfort in a luxury custom home.



LEFT: The great room includes soaring ceilings and a baby grand piano, perfect for evening soirees and weekend brunch parties alike. **BELOW, LEFT TO RIGHT:** A hearth room features vaulted ceilings to accentuate the space's size, while adjacent access to the veranda encourages indoor-outdoor living. A monochromatic palette lets the staircase's curves steal the show. Photos by Greg Grupenhof.



Designing interiors from scratch is second nature for Amy Holt, an interior designer and founder of Designs on Madison. "We see projects from start to finish, beginning with the builder's plans and ending with the final piece of artwork," Holt says of her all-women team.

When asked by the homeowner to work with renowned Cincinnati home builder Hensley Homes, they jumped at the opportunity to join forces on a custom dream home. "Because of our experience, we can work with many different tastes," she says. In this case, the client envisioned a sophisticated yet comfortable home fit for entertaining, where refinery and whimsy act in concert.

With those cues in mind, Holt, along with her colleague and niece, Jill Koch, brought



elegance to the home's common areas. In the great room, tall ceilings, veranda access, and a baby grand piano set the stage for lively soirees, while a jewel-toned area rug and plush pillows lend comfort to a



grandiose space. More elegance ensues in the formal bathroom, where antiqued mirror subway tiles and snakeskin wallpaper, designed by Phillip Jeffries, make an adventurous statement.

The home's architectural features enhance these themes—such as the dramatic curved staircase at the formal entrance, with a handrail stained black to match the piano. Above it, crown molding and a tray ceiling draw the eye upward, defining each turn of the staircase.

Throughout the home, Holt and Koch balanced masculine and feminine energies to honor their clients' personalities. "It's all about layering, and we love for each room to have something special without being over the top," Holt says.

Inside the home's turret is a study, where dark-stained wainscoting, green leather chairs, and a handsome built-in desk evoke the air of a gentleman's club. The room's crown jewel is a bourbon bar set against a mosaic of green, black, and gold tiles.

In the downstairs kitchen—a favorite gathering place of the family—the mood shifts. Here, Carrara marble surfaces and glitzy light fixtures emit a South Beach vibe tempered by earthy gray quartzite countertops.

Building from the ground up allows for any combination of architectural and design details, and Design on Madison's



show houses are often the best way to see these come to life. When working with clients, Holt and Koch ensure no opportunity goes unexplored. They pour over real-life examples and images from social media as they decide which design and architectural features to highlight. That, plus melding disparate design tastes, presents challenges and rewards.

"Creating a look that reflects the homeowners' personalities is our biggest achievement," says Holt.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: The home's turret houses a study, where oversized emerald green chairs encircling a hide rug give the air of a gentleman's club. Green, black, and gold tiles complete the study's bar. Luxe finishes outfit a powder room, with mirrored subway tile backgrounding chandelier-like sconces, a chic gray vanity, and a gold scalloped sink. Gray quartzite counters, classic white shaker cabinets, and crystal pendants elevate the kitchen. Photos by Greg Grupenhof.