



**DETAILS**

**What** A three-bedroom Southern remodel

**Where** Arkansas, USA

**Interior design** Mitchell Hill

# AMERICAN PASTORAL

This Arkansas home combines the best of rural life and city living

Photography Nancy Nolan Words Catherine Coyle

The kitchen is a light-filled, relaxed space where a simple palette works in harmony with a bold printed fabric. Hickory chairs and Roman blinds feature Schumacher's Chiang Mai. Oversized Gustavian lanterns, by Visual Comfort, give an air of luxury. [Previous page] An Anthropologie chair dictates the colour scheme in this twin room. Mitchell Hill's The Greatest floor lamp gives a mid-century modern note. The beds have bespoke pelmets in Schumacher's Chevron d'Été and the Roman blind is the same firm's Aviary fabric



**T**aylor Hill and Michael Mitchell had a difficult job on their hands when they took on the renovation of a three-bedroom property for two of their long-standing clients. The duo were charged with the task of retaining the footprint of the house, while scooping out the insides of the building and devising an entirely new layout. How would they create the illusion of space without actually altering the size of the plot? And, given the diminutive proportions internally, how would they conjure up the grand and spacious interior its owners craved?

The American interior designers (Hill is Texan, while Mitchell hails from South Carolina) like to play with proportion. It's a calling card for Stateside designers and one that sets them apart from their British counterparts. The ability to 'supersize' is not confined to the drive-thru; it can be seen in homes all over the States, from Brooklyn brownstones to Southern pillared properties with wraparound porches. Going large doesn't just give an air of confidence, it also helps to draw attention to key areas or provide a focal point. At this house in Arkansas, it has been added to the playful mix of art and colour, combined with bespoke pieces designed by Mitchell Hill, to rejuvenate the interior.

The centre of Bentonville in Arkansas is midway between a typical all-American town and an up-and-coming hotspot where gentrification is drawing young professionals and new businesses. The leafy central square beside the town hall is reminiscent of the spot where Tom Hanks settles down to deliver his monologue in *Forrest Gump*, and the town, home to the original Walmart, has a museum where visitors can experience a traditional soda fountain café. But Bentonville also has a burgeoning cultural scene that is encouraging locals to leave the suburbs and move closer to the city centre.

"People are selling their homes and buying smaller bungalows, remodelling them and moving downtown," says Mitchell. New restaurants, boutique stores and the recently opened Crystal Bridges ▶



[Above] Flare Back chairs from Hickory Chair sit around a Mercer dining table. The chandelier from Canopy Designs and the Nancy Rhodes painting add bright notes of colour, with textural interest in the form of the renovated barn door



The sitting room is a polished space for entertaining. The paintings are by Debbie Martin and Allyson Reynolds, while the wall sconces were made by Mitchell Hill. The Graves lights on the bookcases are by Visual Comfort and have a pivoting arm that's perfect for libraries



Museum of American Art has given the place a real buzz.

The owners of this house were downsizing now that their children had grown up. They wanted to be able to accommodate visiting grandchildren, but without sacrificing their home's sense of sophistication and maturity. "They emailed us to say, 'We've bought this small house and we're in over our heads. Would you be willing to help?' We jumped at the chance." Mitchell and Hill, who'd worked with the couple on their previous home in Charleston, South Carolina,

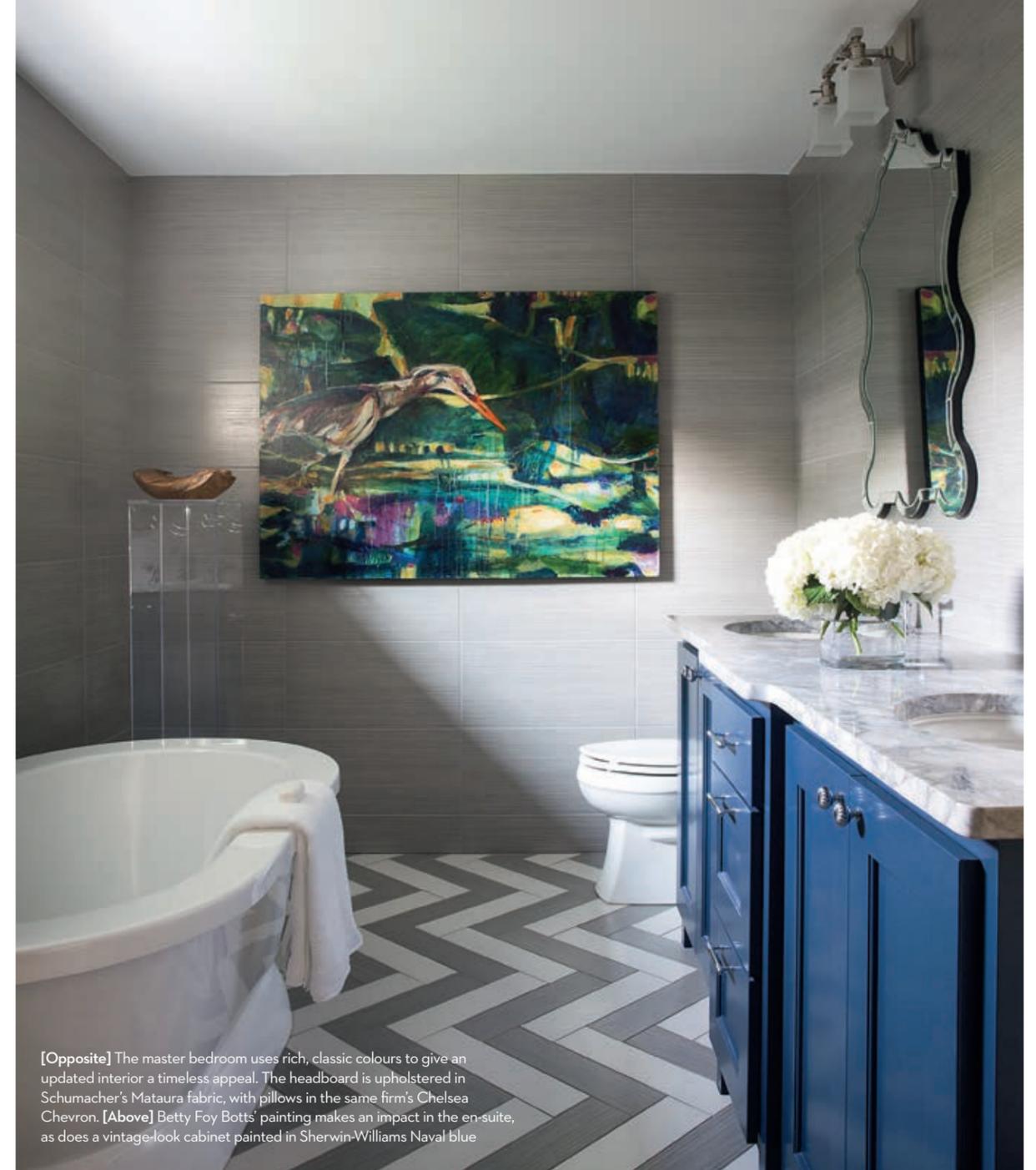
started by drawing up plans to address the internal layout.

"The difficulty with original footprint was that it was like a cottage, with very little room for reconstruction," remembers Mitchell. "We had to create the feel of a larger space through light and colours"

They decided to focus the configuration around the central garden courtyard: "We put French doors in all around the courtyard to open it up and let the light in."

The kitchen enjoys lots of light and so the dark walnut ▶

“A RELATIONSHIP FROM ROOM TO ROOM  
WAS WHAT WE WERE STRIVING FOR”



[Opposite] The master bedroom uses rich, classic colours to give an updated interior a timeless appeal. The headboard is upholstered in Schumacher's Matura fabric, with pillows in the same firm's Chelsea Chevron. [Above] Betty Foy Bott's painting makes an impact in the en-suite, as does a vintage-look cabinet painted in Sherwin-Williams Naval blue

flooring is offset with lots of shiny stainless-steel surfaces, simple Shaker-style kitchen units and Schumacher's bold Chiang Mai Dragon fabric. This vivid print, used here in the alabaster colourway, was central to the scheme devised for the whole house, say the designers. "The colours found here flow into the master bedroom. We wanted to build a sense of continuity through the property; the idea was that you would be able to take any piece of furniture from one room to another and it would still work in that space. A relationship from room to room was what we were striving for."

By using colour to establish a strong identity, each room

has its own distinct spirit while connecting to the wider layout of the house.

Statement lighting is another key component of the scheme – a daring decision, given the low ceilings of this cottage-style property. Here, the two metal-framed pendants by Gustavian bring a sense of drama to the kitchen; coupled with the lively Schumacher fabric, it makes this more than just a room in which to cook.

With an extended family and lots of friends, the owners knew their house had to be suitable for entertaining. The designers took this into account in the adjoining dining ▶



[The page and opposite] Hints of nature bring the indoors and outdoors together in the guest bedroom. Julian Chichester's Felix bench is draped in a Brunswig & Fils velvet. The cushion on the bed uses another Schumacher fabric, Ming Fret. Made Goods' Lillian mirror gives the bathroom a touch of 'fairytale folkland' amplified by Birds & Butterflies wallpaper

room, making clever use of the space with a dining table that mirrors the island in the kitchen. A refurbished Victorian barn door adds character – it’s made of walnut on one side and oak on the other, giving a different flavour to each space. Space is saved by having it on a sliding track rather than normal hinges. The blue glass Sara chandelier, by Canopy Design, is a response to the clients’ abiding love of colour and picks up on the duck-egg blue on the ceiling, but it’s also a work of art in its own right.

The central living area is an elegant and sophisticated space, with a grand piano taking pride of place. Its dark wood is reflected by the highly polished walnut floorboards, with a plum velvet chesterfield sofa adding a note of softness. Splashes of colour abound; the watercolour-effect curtains are Schumacher’s Chiang Mai fabric again, and pick out colours from a painting by Australian artist Allyson Reynolds.

The three bedrooms are bright and playful while still projecting a serious love of design. The master bedroom has a paisley-patterned bespoke headboard in Schumacher’s Mataura linen. Hudson sconces by Visual Comfort give an antique vibe that chimes with the cosy cottage proportions.

In the guest bedroom, a connection to the garden comes through French doors and the subtle use of green in the soft furnishings. A Julian Chichester bench has been covered in a lush Lubeck velvet by Brunschwig & Fils, with Schumacher’s Birds & Butterflies fabric dressing the bedroom windows and linking to the en-suite bathroom where the same print is used on the walls.

“The look is collective – it’s deliberate,” explains Hill. “The pieces we have put together reflect the clients’ comfortable, kind personalities. It’s a very relaxed style of living, where you can walk in wearing heels, flip-flops or barefoot.” ■



Another view of the master bedroom. With not much space to play with, the designers made sure to use every nook and cranny, as they’ve done here with this space-saving bookcase