New Orleans
HOMES
6 DAZZLING KITCHENS
RENO OF THE YEAR
An historic Henry Howard home and garçonnière gets a new life
THE BIG BOOK OF KING CAKE
HENRY HOWARD
SPRING 2023

Perfect Patina

A renovated Greek Revival double-gallery townhouse honors the original design by prominent local architect Henry Howard

By Misty Milioto | Photography by Sara Essex Bradley

High school sweethearts Matt and Christina Meisner lived in Austin when they visited New Orleans for their second wedding anniversary in 2013. "[We] basically couldn't stay away after that," Christina says. The couple, who also lived in Melbourne previously, found a lot of similarities. "Our time in Melbourne ... solidified our appreciation for historic homes, walkable neighborhoods and tight-knit community," Matt adds.

As the couple started planning their stateside return, their dreams of living in New Orleans shifted from idea to reality. Matt began researching neighborhoods and looking for the right home. "We saved recently sold historic homes we liked and got in touch with the Realtors behind those sales, which led us to Jonathan Maki and Brent Talavera at McEnery Residential," Matt says.

When a 1852 Greek Revival double-gallery townhouse designed by Henry Howard hit the market, it was time. The Meisners closed on the nearly 4,900-square-foot property, which includes the main house and a garçonnière, in May 2020 and immediately began renovation on the main house. Their primary goal was to make improvements while still being respectful of the home's history. That meant keeping a timeless style highlighting the layers of the home's past — easily seen in the existing patina of the multicolor plaster and paint layers throughout the home.

The living room features a reproduction five-foot ceiling medallion by Lachin Ornamental, an Elizabeth gold chandelier by Currey & Co. (sourced by Curated Studio), a two-piece antique mirror with marble base (circa 1850s, around the same time the home was built) gifted from the sellers, Matt and Barb Ryan, yellow vintage chairs and a vintage coffee table (all from Merchant House), a midcentury modern cream bouclé sofa with rattan side panels by Object Biographies from Merchant House topped with Mongolian lamb pillows in platinum from West Elm, 1940s Grosfeld House Art Deco channel-barrel-back swivel tub chairs in blue velvet from Chairish and an area rug from Renaissance Interiors.

The Meisners worked with King Cole Construction to address immediate repairs and improvements. They also worked with Lauren Taylor and Kakin Nichols at Austin-based Curated Studio to create an initial vision for the fireplaces, the living and dining rooms, bedrooms and bathrooms. "They were instrumental in bringing our vision to life when everything felt so daunting in those early days, especially when it came to finishes," Christina says. "We intentionally chose materials that would wear over time and add to the home's story, like the honed marble in the kitchen and the brass fixtures in the primary bath."

"With the help of King Cole Construction and Mark Derby at Derby Pottery and Tile, we restored all six fireplaces with new tile, hearths and summer fronts," Matt adds. "That collaboration set the tone for the rest of our journey."

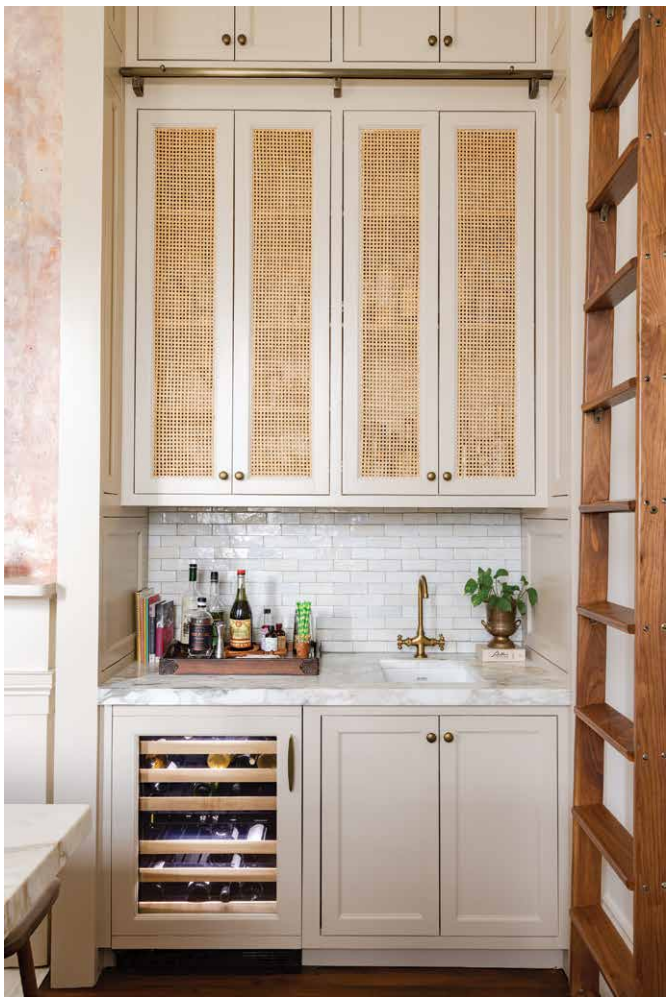
The couple also worked with Sweeney Restoration to oversee most of the general interior renovations and repairs.

Shortly before their first child was born, the Meisners (who were still living in Austin) realized two obstacles: They needed to renovate the kitchen prior to moving in, and they couldn't continue to manage the process from out of state during a pandemic.

The couple researched architects whose house portfolios they liked and were pleased when they found Leslie Raymond, vice president and principal, and Dan Akerley, senior project manager, at Albert Architecture. Raymond and Akerley oversaw general maintenance and repairs to the home's existing historic elements, and conceptualized the design — from drawing production to assisting with custom interior details and coordination of contractors and subcontractors — during construction. They also acted as the Meisners' onsite representation while the couple was still living in Austin.

"The homeowners had some initial selections for bathroom finishes, and Albert Architecture worked with them to integrate these selections into a cohesive design approach for the entire house," Akerley says.

The biggest transformation came in the form of the kitchen, which had an odd layout that made it feel small. "The range and vent hood jutted out into the center of the room, so, when you walked in the front door and looked down the hall, all you could see was this giant vent hood," Christina says. "There wasn't much natural light, and the space felt heavy. We wanted to open things up where we could, let in as much light as possible and celebrate these incredible spaces (and tall ceilings) by giving them room to breathe."



Top: Most of the renovations were centered on the kitchen, which now features a custom rolling library ladder in walnut with antique brass finishes by Alaco and original fireplace mantel refurbished by Picardie Timber Frame + Millwork with a custom mosaic hearth with tiles by Zio & Sons and clé tile. The Mackson 1 single dome pendant lights by Alcott Hill are from Wayfair, and the Esse Canyon counter stools in walnut with charcoal matte leather are from Article. Bottom: The kitchen also features custom cabinetry that was build onsite by Pomar Gutierrez Renovation. The Meisners even hid a time capsule in the kitchen wall that includes a family photo and a handwritten note that a future family member may one day discover. Facing Page: Pomar Gutierrez Renovation also custom-built a walnut island and floating walnut shelves. The Calacatta Vagli honed marble countertops are from Triton Stone and the ceiling-height weathered white Zellige wall tile are by clé tile. The Meisners kept the original patina pantry door.

In the kitchen, the team changed the courtyard door into a window, which allowed for more counter space, doubled the amount of natural light and allowed more freedom in the redesign. Meanwhile, Matt's main goal for the kitchen was to have built-in cabinetry with a library ladder that would make full use of the ceiling height. Local carpentry company Pomar Gutierrez Renovation built custom kitchen cabinets onsite (some have the added touch of rattan detailing in lieu of glass for added texture and warmth).

The Meisners kept the original patina pantry door and renovated the rest of the kitchen. It now features pine wood flooring stained to match the rest of the house, a dramatic window wall and floating walnut shelves with integrated light coves, weathered white Zellige tile that showcases the height of the space, a custom walnut island, honed Calacatta Vagli marble countertops with unique veining patterns in tones of pink, green and blue, and a walnut ladder with brass rail.

Pomar Gutierrez Renovation also created a built-in with rattan doors for the living room, a vanity for the primary and guest bathrooms, an office bookshelf on the third floor and a new bedroom closet.

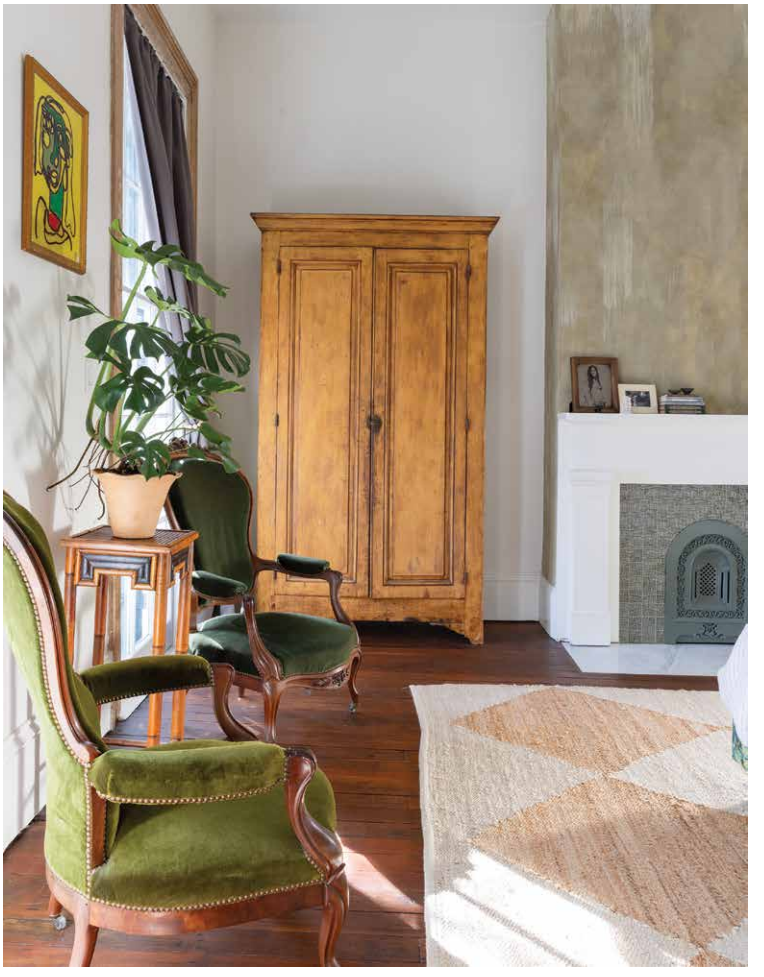
Facing page: The sophisticated dining room is set against a backdrop of Farrow & Ball Inchyra Blue paint and features Greek Revival trim (some original), a custom fireplace mantel by Picardie Timber Frame + Millwork with custom fireplace and hearth tile by Derby Pottery and Tile. The Entellina chandelier is by Julie Neill for Visual Comfort, while the antique trumeau mirror is from Consign Consign, the antique Louis XV deux corps with glass door panels is from Renaissance Interiors and the custom dining table in reclaimed cypress with dentil detailing is from Dop Antiques. The Meisners purchased the two 19th-century antique armchairs with caned seats (the first pieces they purchased specifically for this house) in the Texas Hill Country on their babymoon. An antique area rug from Six Vintage Rugs finishes off the space. Top: Commissioned artwork, "Banana Bunch in Blue" by Anna Koeferl, keeps the the sleek living room approachable and fun. Pomar Gutierrez Renovation created the custom built-in, while Derby Pottery and Tile provided the custom fireplace tile. The Elizabeth gold chandelier is by Currey & Co.; the vintage coffee table and set of yellow velvet armchairs are from Merchant House; and the area rug is from Renaissance Interiors. Bottom left: The custom fireplace tile in the nursery is decorative alligator and grass by Derby Pottery and Tile with a custom soapstone hearth. The commissioned mantel art is by Anna Koeferl. Bottom right: The second floor hallway, which leads to a guest bedroom and courtyard gallery, showcases architect Henry Howard's plaster walls with signature curved corners (repaired by Sylvia T. Designs to match the existing patina).

Of course, the Meisners kept some of the original details, including the aging faux bois trim and doors, and the double-hung pass-through windows with operable upper sashes. Some of the plaster walls were salvageable, and Sylvia T. Designs repaired those in the second floor hallway. She also added new plaster to the master bedroom with a patina to complement the rest of the home. Additionally, some of the original Henry Howard fireplace mantels were intact. For those that were not, the Meisners hired Picardie Timber Frame + Millwork to create custom reproductions.

The Meisners allowed the home's framework to determine the color palette. For example, they built the kitchen around the plaster fireplace, the powder bath around the green door's patina, the primary bath around the mossy green clawfoot tub, and both the second floor guest bedroom and nursery around the weathered fireplaces.

"We also wanted moments of fun to keep things from feeling too stuffy or formal," Christina says. "So there's the Schumacher wallpaper in the powder bath that reminds me of my favorite Dr. Seuss book growing up, the House of Hackney wallpaper in the water closet that's a nod to our travels across southeast Asia, the blue and yellow mosaic tile in the guest bath, and the unusual Derby Pottery grass and gator tile for the nursery fireplace."

Overall, the Meisners found it paramount to honor the history of their home while adding to its character. "The house has been through a pretty incredible transformation in the last two decades," Christina says. "Matt found a Flickr album that indicated the house was up for demolition by neglect before Katrina hit, and it documents some of the painstaking, five-year restoration work the previous owners Matt and Barb Ryan, the sellers we purchased the home from, completed post-Katrina."

"We can only imagine the stories held within these walls," Matt says, "So we liked the idea of capturing what remained rather than fully restoring it back to the 1850s. A century's worth of patina is hard to recreate. It's art to us."

Top: The sofa in the living room is flanked by a pair of Julie spindle side tables in walnut from One Kings Lane. The artwork (from left to right) is by Graham Franciose, Mary Ball and Cubs the Poet. Bottom: The master bath features an existing cast-iron tub that was refinished and repainted, a custom vanity in Calacatta Vagli marble and walnut with fluted panels by Pomar Gutierrez Renovation, an Art Nouveau bistro chair with embossed croc pattern (circa 1910s) by Fischel from Sidehaul NOLA and a limited-edition linen print by Maja Dlugolecki. Facing page: Top left: In the nursery, a Rory convertible crib in weathered white with dentil detail from Pottery Barn Kids sits atop a hand-knotted Kashkuli Gabbeh wool rug from rugs.com. The vintage French Empire chandelier in walnut and pewter was sourced by Curated Studio, and the motorized flat Roman blackout shades in dark green posh velvet are from The Shade Store. Top right: The powder bath comes to life with Schumacher wallpaper in Coconut Grove, Leaf (sourced by Curated Studio). The light sconce is from Pottery Barn; the midcentury French Riviera curved rattan and bamboo Italian oval mirror is from 1stDibs; the Calacatta Vagli marble is from Architectural Tile & Stone in Austin; and the faucet and hardware in aged brass is by Newport Brass. Bottom left: The master bedroom is a dreamy respite thanks to a modern wingback queen bed in verdure bois de chene by Old World Weavers from The Inside by Havenly, a white-bead gilded chandelier in white and gold sourced by Curated Studio, artwork by Cubs the Poet and an ivory jute harlequin trellis area rug from Rugs USA. Bottom right: Another view of the master bedroom shows a custom fireplace mantel by Picardie Timber Frame + Millwork with Carrara marble hearth, custom fireplace tile by Derby Pottery and Tile, a decorative plaster wall by Sylvia T. Designs, a pair of antique chairs in green velvet from Consign Consign, a bamboo plant stand by Object Biographies from Merchant House and an antique armoire purchased from the sellers, Matt and Barb Ryan.