

SECOND ACT

| *Alair Homes Decatur reimagines a family's historic Midtown home* |

by DANA W. TODD / *photography by* MARC MAULDIN PHOTOGRAPHY



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AMILLE AND OMAR HASAN HAD BEEN LIVING IN A HIGH-RISE condo for the last decade. “I love being in town, where everything is walkable, and I told Omar the only way he could get me to move was if we bought a historic home that was also in town,” Camille Hasan says. When they found a 1910 American foursquare in an established Midtown neighborhood, it seemed to answer all of her requests, so they purchased it. “I love the older Craftsman style with all of its character,” she adds.

Before they could move from vertical living to their historic home, it needed total renovation, including new electrical wiring and plumbing, updated interiors and a refreshed exterior. After interviewing many builders, they chose Alair Homes Decatur to handle the renovation. “We talked to a variety of builders, but they all seemed to be focused on new construction,” Hasan says. “Alair was a perfect fit for us because they primarily do renovation work.”

Heather Shuster, partner at Alair Homes Decatur, and her contracting team speak the language of older homes. “There are so many historic homes in the downtown area,” Shuster says. “About 95% of our business is historical renovation, so our level of experience made us a perfect fit for the Hasans’ project. The house is in a prime location off of Piedmont Park and has amazing bones, but it was in rough shape.”

Alair was asked to create a home with interiors that would be light, bright and airy, a vision that is often counterintuitive to old homes that have never been appropriately updated. “This home was brown inside and out,” Shuster says. “Previous poor design choices and neglect left the home dark and dated, with an odd layout. The Hasans trusted us to create the type of home they envisioned; they are busy and did not want to be weekend warriors trying to do it themselves.”

Alair introduced several local interior design firms to Hasan, and she ultimately chose Gordon Dunning Interior Design Studio, led by co-founders and co-principals Lathem Gordon and Cate Dunning, for its focus on historical detailing. Hasan is passionate about design and

The homeowner chose some new furnishings—an RH table and skirted side chairs and a John-Richard chandelier—while accenting with antique French mirrors and chests in the dining room. On the ceiling, Benjamin Moore’s “Hale Navy” adds a dose of coziness.

previous: Alair Homes opened the dining room and living room to each other with arched openings to enhance the light, bright and airy feel requested by the homeowners. The design and building team also remade the original living room fireplace with new molding and tile.



A new arched entryway opens the kitchen to the dining room. The new kitchen features Visual Comfort Darlana lanterns, a copper vent hood and white ceramic tile laid in a herringbone pattern on wraparound backsplash walls.





The original fireplace in the primary bedroom was refreshed with a new blue tile surround, and the bedroom was bedazzled with the homeowner's choice of a Shades of Light aged wood, beaded chandelier.

right top:
Alair Homes modernized an upstairs hall bath, adding a double vanity to better serve the homeowners' daughters.

right bottom:
A bedroom was turned into a nursery in anticipation of the homeowners' first child, who was born soon after they moved in.



decorating, so she took the reins to oversee this part of her own project but called on Gordon Dunning to handle all of the interior architecture, production of construction drawings and selection of builder finishes. "Camille got to practice her passion, and we focused on designing a space for how the family would live and figured out the flow from room to room," says Dunning.

The flow of the rooms on both levels of the 3,400-square-foot home was disjointed and nonsensical by today's standards. "Whenever we approach a historic home, its history is a huge driver," says designer Lathem Gordon. "We want to honor the space as it was built but also meet the needs of a modern family. While the home was magnificent, its interior layout was not conducive to this era of family living. We focused on combining and rearranging rooms that made more sense for them."

The first order of business was to find a new location for the kitchen. "The kitchen was stuck in a small area at the back of the house in what was probably a 1980s-era addition. It was detached from the flow of the rest of the home," says Shuster. By moving the kitchen into a more central location on the main level next to the existing dining room and close to the living room, and opening up all three rooms to each other with large, arched openings, Alair provided a more open gathering space for family members and for future entertaining. The modernized kitchen has an eat-in island, with a prep sink and cabinetry storage, covered in a creamy white quartzite with thin charcoal veining. The revamp also provided space for a new pantry.

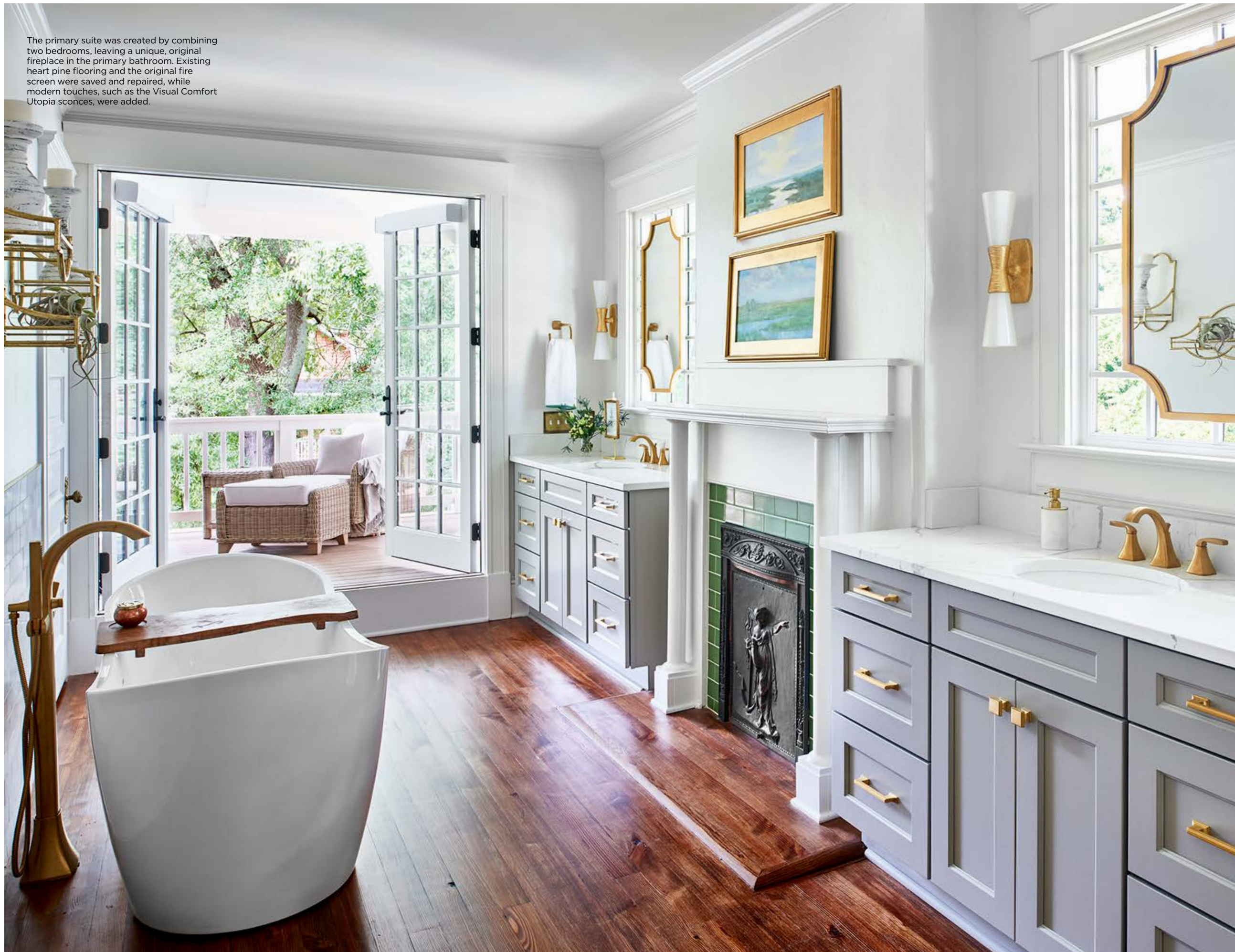
Moving the kitchen left space for a proper mudroom at the back entrance, where the team added customized functionality with built-in storage and a feeding area for the dogs. A pot-filler mounted over the water bowl is a welcome addition. The design team turned the remainder of the extra space at the back of the home into a powder bath and a built-in bar nook. "We saved a stained glass window that was hidden away in a small bathroom and reused it as a focal point in the bar," Dunning says. "We built around that piece of history."

Two of the home's four original fireplaces are on the main level in the living room and dining room. The team kept the dining room's antique wooden mantel but updated the oddly designed living room fireplace into a more aesthetically pleasing design with a period-appropriate fire screen.

Hasan began planning her design scheme to add color and character to her new home. "I am not afraid of color," she says, which is evident the moment visitors step through the front door and see the sunroom/sitting room. A burst of hues greets them: a green velvet couch with pops of bright pink on its pillows and a wallpapered ceiling encompassing the blue, green, creamy white and pink palette that flows throughout the home.

"Camille always had a vision for the colors she wanted to use. She has a no-holds-barred attitude when it comes to adding color," Dunning says.

The primary suite was created by combining two bedrooms, leaving a unique, original fireplace in the primary bathroom. Existing heart pine flooring and the original fire screen were saved and repaired, while modern touches, such as the Visual Comfort Utopia sconces, were added.



Upstairs, the homeowners requested that the team carve out space for a primary suite and reorganize rooms for a better flow. “There was not a bathroom appropriate for a modern family,” Shuster says. “In fact, there was only one bathroom with one sink that served four bedrooms and no true en suite primary bedroom.”

“What was once a potential teardown has become a neighborhood favorite. Through careful analysis, salvage, restoration and rejuvenation, this home has succeeded in being modernized and historically celebrated.”

To create a primary suite suitable in size, two adjacent bedrooms were combined, lacing in heart pine boards as needed to match the home’s original flooring. Both bedrooms had decorative fireplaces with intact original iron fire screens. Alair refinished the fireplace surrounds with tiles in the blue and green colorway Hasan had chosen. The unusual perk of having a fireplace feature in the primary bathroom posed a challenge. The fireplace had original windows on each side of it, which left little space for the cabinetry and mirrors necessary in a functional bathroom. Since the team was intent on preserving as much of the home’s original character as possible, they chose to leave all of the original architectural elements in place, building separate vanities under each window and placing mirrors on top of the windows. “It was a challenging puzzle to figure out and fit all the pieces together, but it’s the hardest challenges that pay off the most,” say the designers.

“Camille got her large closet, and I love that we found a layout that worked with the fireplace in the primary bath. The family also got access from the primary bathroom



Alair Homes added a new second story porch as an outdoor living room for the homeowners to relax while their children play close by.

to a new upper-level front porch addition,” Shuster says. The new porch has clear views of Downtown Atlanta, especially in the winter when the trees are bare. It’s a place the Hasan family can gather—there have been two babies added in recent times—and enjoy watching the neighborhood action on the street below. “It has become a secondary living space, where all of us can hang out and relax,” Hasan says.

Alair enlarged the tiny original hall bathroom with a single sink on the upper floor into one with double vanities, a tub and a shower that will serve both daughters as they grow. The previously enclosed sleeping porch became a charming bedroom for one of their daughters.

While the interior design changes were appealingly elegant, Alair solved less exciting issues that made the home look more historically accurate and increased its energy efficiency. The construction team updated all electrical and plumbing systems and either rehabbed or replaced original windows, adding double-paned glass. “The replacements replicated the windows’ original grid pattern. We also removed dated frosted sidelights beside the front door that were added during a previous renovation. They were not in keeping with the home’s original age. The types of details we added better reflect the historical accuracy of the residence,” Shuster explains. Alair also repaired the exterior siding and gave it a fresh coat of paint in Hasan’s chosen color, Benjamin Moore’s “Stratton Blue,” a muted blue-green that introduces the home’s interior palette and fits in with the neighborhood.

“The team was conscious about updating and modernizing the interiors. While we added modern lighting and bolder, graphic wallcoverings, our choices of hardware and plumbing fixtures and the addition of crown molding support a historic look,” Shuster says.

“We’re storytellers and have the privilege of creating a backdrop for the family’s memories, a space where they are going to live their lives,” the designers say. “Together, we all were building history for a new caretaker. History created the lines we colored within.”

Shuster adds: “What was once a potential teardown has become a neighborhood favorite. Through careful analysis, salvage, restoration and rejuvenation, this home has succeeded in being modernized and historically celebrated.” *

Dana W. Todd is a professional writer specializing in interior design, real estate, luxury homebuilding, landscape design, architecture and fine art.

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