

BIRMINGHAM

showhouse



In the shallow alcove, a David Braly painting hangs between Kevin Reilly sconces. A pair of round windows by Marvin crown the adjacent bookcases. The settee is by Edward Ferrell. The fabrics are by Travers.

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For the 2004 *Southern Accents* Showhouse, architect Hank Long and decorator Mary Evelyn McKee combine the appeal and character of the Old World with the ease and luxury of the modern age

Throughout Europe, village life is frequently lived in close proximity to one's neighbors. Vintage houses bump up against each other, and daily rhythms resonate over garden walls. Such intimate associations are what inspired Birmingham architect Hank Long of Henry Sprott Long & Associates as he designed the 2004 *Southern Accents* Showhouse.

The house is one of several he conceived for a new enclave barely a breeze away from the Birmingham Botanical Gardens in the Mountain Brook area, one of the most favored locales in the city. Decorator Mary Evelyn McKee fashioned the laid-back, luxurious interiors to reflect an easy elegance.

Constructed of brick covered with a thick coating of buff-colored paint, the house looks as though it has stood in place for decades, as if the surface has been replastered over time. The predominately French influence shows in the hipped roof, although Long admits, "I pulled from other Continental, as well as English, influences."

While old-world proximity has its charm, the desire for privacy is paramount in modern America. Facing this inherent tension posed a few challenges for the architect. "We are in a tight community, with only 10 feet separating the houses," says the architect, "so we had to design a

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ABOVE: A Regency bench by Patina and a Moattar rug draw visitors through the entry hall. The lantern is by Baker. **RIGHT:** McKee chose a round dining table from Lewis Mittman and fabrics by The Curtain Exchange for the dining chairs and the billowing curtains.

house that maintains a sense of privacy yet feels open and light-filled." Long accomplished this by varying the ceilings and installing windows of opaque marine glass.

The ceilings on the first floor create a feeling of spaciousness, ranging from 10 feet in the master bedroom and bath

to 14 feet in the living room. The living room, with its timbered oak treatments on the ceilings and an overscaled cast-stone mantel, reminds McKee of a Renaissance library. "We didn't want to cover up its strong architectural features," she says. "The room needed to feel clean and





THESE PAGES: A chorus line of drawers and top-latch cabinets by Bulthaup keep essentials stored neatly out of sight in the kitchen. DuPont Zodiac countertops and stainless steel appliances by Thermador and U-Line are juxtaposed with random-width oak floors from Olde Savannah Flooring.

understated with a focus on the artwork and also on the furnishings as sculpture." Crewelwork draperies, a sisal floor covering, and chairs and ottomans dressed in linen velvet blend in with the serene, neutral palette.

In the original plan, floor-to-ceiling windows were designed along the south-facing

living room wall, and although they added more light, the direct view of the house next door invaded the comfort zone. "It was a tricky decision," McKee says. "Were we going to give up light or make this wall more useful?" The problem was solved without a compromise. Long designed a series of three arches along the wall,



creating space for paired bookcases and a shallow alcove, where McKee placed a handsome settee. Light flows into the room through the opaque marine-glass windows set high on the wall. "Now you don't see the house next door," says McKee, "and the overscaled bookcases give the room even more texture."

Old World meets 21st century in the kitchen. The sleek lines of the contemporary cabinets are a counterpoint to the traditional mood of the house. The kitchen connects to the living room through an open doorway, and the rooms are linked stylistically by the timbered ceilings and circular windows. "You will frequently see European houses remodeled in this way," says McKee, "with high-tech, modern kitchens worked into centuries-old rooms."

McKee intentionally created a more formal setting in the dining room, which opens onto its own walled courtyard. The full draperies, done in classic charcoal and cream, are soft, "like billowing ball-gown skirts," she says. "I wanted the room to feel more feminine." A dramatic 76-inch-round table made perfect sense in the nearly square room.

In European fashion, a requisite walled garden wraps around the rear of the house, communicating directly with the living room and back porch. Its well-rooted appearance is a tribute to garden designer Mary Zuhl, who specified the use of mature plantings.

Long and McKee have infused the Birmingham showhouse with appealing warmth and embracing comfort, making it a home for all seasons. ♦
For details, see Sourcebook, page 90.



A European-influenced walled garden in the rear reinforces the house's sense of privacy. Garden design by Mary Zuhl and furniture by Barlow Tyrie create an inviting outdoor room that rivals the refined comfort and simplicity of the interiors.

