

# A Present from the Past

Sarah Whit Interior Design updates a historic farmhouse in East Lakeview without sacrificing an ounce of its original charm.

*By Diana Bitting*

*Photography by Anthony Tablier*

Restraint is a rare jewel in the world of interior design. It seems every designer these days prefers spaces that scream for attention over more understated updates. When the Stallkamps, a family of four with two young girls, moved into a historic farmhouse in East Lakeview with a charming gabled roofline and wraparound porch, they were determined to pay tribute to its original architecture while tweaking the interiors to reflect their modern inclinations.

Bridget, a research consultant, and her husband, Tim, had courted numerous interior designers over a few months, with each one insisting they start from scratch in the kitchen (the first phase of the renovation). But the homeowners both wanted to preserve the soul of the house as much as possible, since the existing materials were high-end and the craftsmanship was impressive. “I was complaining to my friend that I couldn’t find a firm that was willing to help me update the kitchen without ripping out the old oak cabinets,” says Bridget. “It had good bones, but I knew I wanted to lighten things up. She suggested that I contact Sarah Whit.”

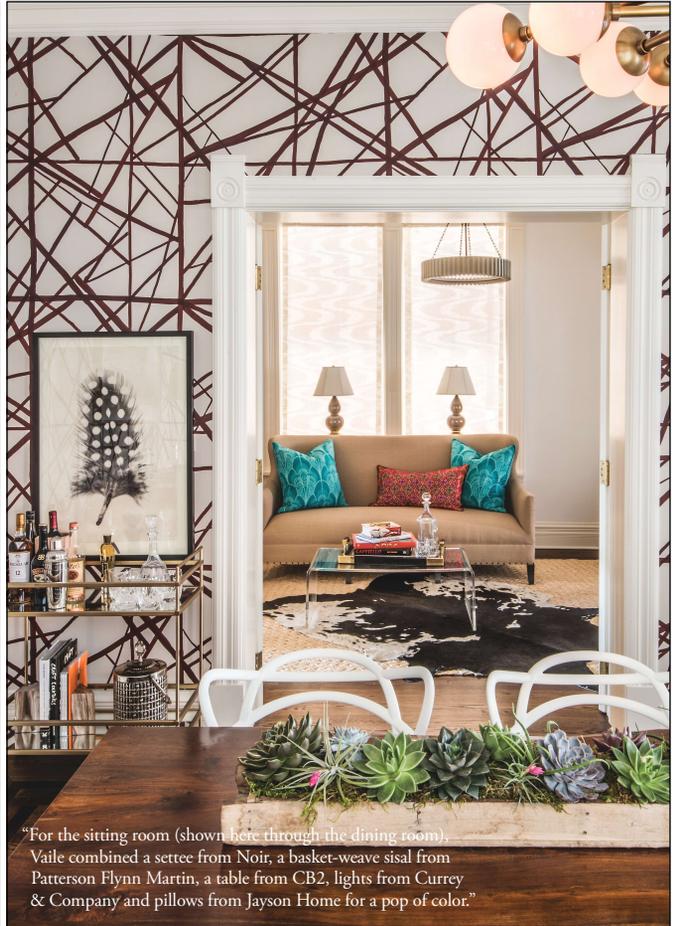
Sarah Vaile, principal of Chicago-based Sarah Whit Interior Design (513.518.6208, sarahwhit.com), happens to have an affinity for vintage woodwork paired with clean lines and a light palette herself, so it was a natural fit. She and business partner Hayley O’Hara took a tour of the Stallkamps’ home and agreed that there were a lot of existing elements that could be salvaged or tweaked in the redesign, starting with the kitchen. “We painted the cabinets gray, swapped out the glass in the doors for antique mirror and went with a clean white Caesarstone countertop to juxtapose the woodwork,” says Vaile. They left alone the solid oak island (an antique Shearer grain feeder that was repurposed from the old barn that formerly stood out back) to reflect the home’s farmhouse history, but extended the new countertop over the edge to serve as an extra work area. “I was worried that it would crowd the kitchen, but it is the ultimate spot for our kids now,” says Bridget. “We bake together in that spot. They sit there and tell me about their day while I make dinner, and they use the under-the-counter space as a hiding spot, pretend jail or My Little Pony headquarters—whatever works for the game they are playing that day.”

In the living room, all of the original millwork was kept in tact, but the fireplace received a facelift courtesy of tile and stone from Ann Sacks. Chairs by Noir upholstered with Holland & Sherry fabric, mirror by Bunny Williams Home

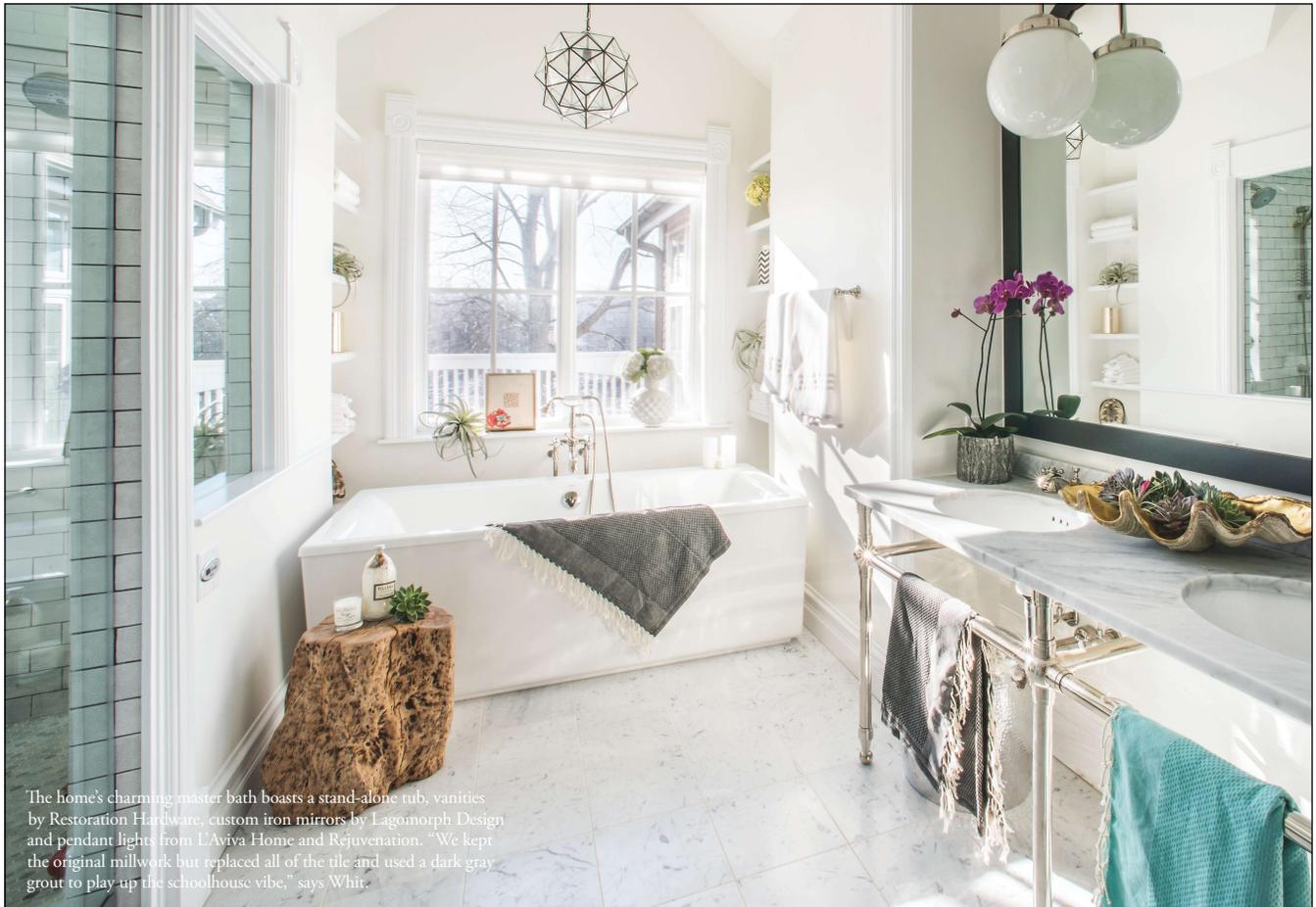




“The living room has gorgeous, original millwork that I wanted to showcase,” says Vaile. “So we kept it simple on the walls and chose a bold rug to set the tone.”



“For the sitting room (shown here through the dining room), Vaile combined a settee from Noir, a basket-weave sisal from Patterson Flynn Martin, a table from CB2, lights from Currey & Company and pillows from Jayson Home for a pop of color.”



“The home’s charming master bath boasts a stand-alone tub, vanities by Restoration Hardware, custom iron mirrors by Lagonorph Design and pendant lights from L’Aviva Home and Rejuvenation. “We kept the original millwork but replaced all of the tile and used a dark gray grout to play up the schoolhouse vibe,” says Whitt.”



For the kitchen, Sarah Whit Interior Design collaborated with Great Midwest Construction for the full renovation, including adding reclaimed wood beams from Smart Mouth Designs. Silver pendant lights from Barn Light Electric, bar stools from CB2, custom Corian countertop

For the previous owners, four decorative rotund pillars helped define the office/breakfast area off the kitchen as a separate statement, but with neoclassical details that didn't make sense, they had to go. Vaile and O'Hara switched them out for rustic stained beams that matched the oak island and added a transitional farmhouse theme to the space—the impetus of which was a single, small piece of furniture. “The breakfast table was really our muse,” says Vaile, referring to a midcentury Saarinen Tulip table which, when combined with the traditional Windsor-style robin's-egg blue chairs from Serena & Lily, served as inspiration for the rest of the home, including the master bath—the second leg of the project.

An uber-contemporary update had left the master bath with a Sputnik vibe (frosted glass, recessed bowl sinks, mirrored cabinetry, brushed nickel fixtures), one that Bridget and Tim wanted to eradicate as swiftly as possible. In its place, Sarah Whit designed an airy, light, spa-like space, with gorgeous Carrara marble floors, white-washed walls and doors, a vintage-inspired chrome-and-white stone vanity and an art deco dressing table with Lucite knobs. Custom Belgrave-style mirrors by Lagomorph Designs in an ebony finish break up the white backdrop, and a brass wire chair from Jayson Home adds a pop of glamour. The bathtub, with its clean geometry, is the modern element in the room—contrasted perfectly by a throwback chrome hand shower from Waterworks and an iron and frosted glass pendant light from L'Aviva Home.

To give the owners' raw wood dining room table new life, Sarah Whit Interior Design worked in modern chairs from Design Within Reach, bold wallpaper by Kelly Wearstler for Lee Jofa and contemporary lighting from Arteriors.





To make the fireplace in the family room a focal point, Vaile chose hand-painted concrete tile from Virginia Tile.

The dining room underwent a redo as well with the addition of a stunning globe chandelier from Arteriors, modern white chairs from Design Within Reach and a plum and oatmeal colored abstract print wallpaper. “We had wanted some kind of accent wall and thought wallpaper would be cool,” says Bridget. “When the girls suggested the Kelly Wearstler pattern, Tim and I thought, ‘This is either going to be great or totally crazy.’ And then they said, ‘Do the whole room!’ We took a deep breath and went with it. And now it’s one of my favorite elements in the house.” Combined with the owners’ reclaimed wood table and a custom wood buffet—a wedding present from Bridget’s father, who dabbles in carpentry and furniture restoration—the room is the perfect mix of edge and sophistication.

Sarah Whit refaced a few of the fireplaces throughout the home as well, including the bulky, oak and green marble hearth in the living room. Its new look nicely echoes the 19th-century Hanover lines of the built-in bookshelves to the left and right, but incorporates a sleek marble surround. Another standout piece in the living room is the lotus flower rug by Madeline Weinrib, which O’Hara in particular had been eagerly hoping to spec for quite some time. “There are all these samples in our office that we love. We pull them and hang the photos or swatches up on our wall to wait for the right client,” says O’Hara. “We finally found them!”

The success of this home is due in large part to the synergy between clients and designers. Both sides share kind sentiments about the experience. “The best part of the process is when Sarah Whit put together the inspiration boards,” says Bridget. “It was their job to push the boundaries, my job to think about whether or not my family could live in it, and my husband’s job to bring everyone back down to reality.” That three-pronged approach helped transform a dark, dated dwelling into a whimsical, light-filled abode that pays respects to the past while allowing its inhabitants to live every day perfectly in the present. **sl**