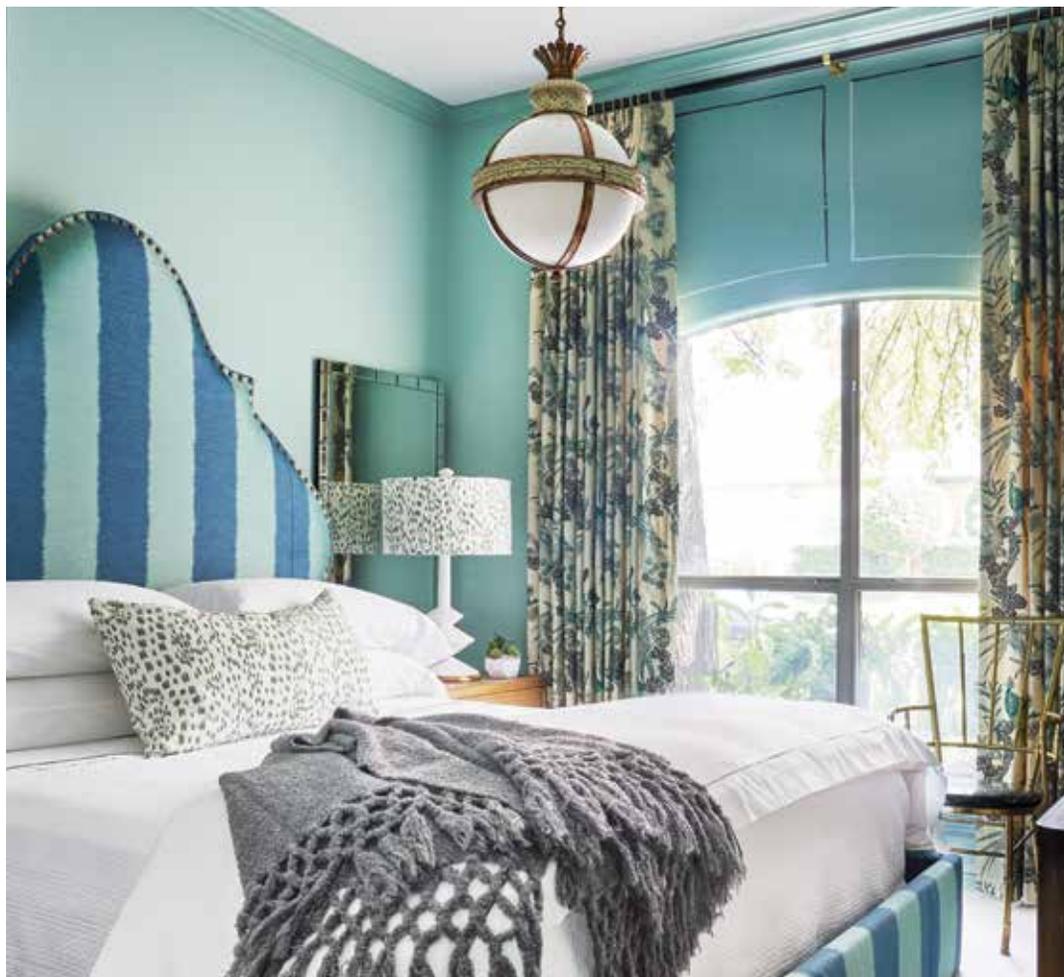


# A Recipe for Style

FLOWER VISITS WITH DALLAS DESIGNER DENISE MCGAHA TO LEARN ABOUT HER BEGINNINGS, HER PASSIONS, AND HOW SHE PUTS TOGETHER A FIVE-STAR GUEST SUITE

By Alice Welsh Doyle • Photography by Stephen Karlisch



**F**lower: You don't have a traditional background for an interior designer. Tell us about your upbringing and work experience. **Denise McGaha:**

I grew up in rural Texas and was involved with agriculture through the 4-H club. One thing I learned at a young age was the value of hard work, and that has brought me to where I am today. I majored in agricultural economics at Texas A & M,

but fashion has always been a big part of who I am. I interviewed at Neiman Marcus, but they told me I needed retail experience. So I went and got it by becoming a general manager at a landscape retailer. I was eventually hired at Neiman's and started at the bottom working my way up, and I loved it. I was lured away to Sprint by a big salary. It wasn't really me, but we had the income to build a home. That's when I became enthralled with the

**THIS PAGE:** Alexa Hampton for Theodore Alexander headboard in fabric by Celerie Kemble for Schumacher; globe lantern from Circa Lighting; Peacock Alley bedding; Denise McGaha for Currey & Co. lamps with custom shades in Brunshwig & Fils *Les Touches* fabric • Nightstands by Michael Berman for Theodore Alexander • Curtains in Schumacher's *Peacock* in Emerald



**CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE:** “The bathroom was designed around this wonderful botanical wallpaper from Cole & Son,” says McGaha. • Special touches like the Addison Weeks hardware bring some glam to the small space. • The embroidered lines on the luxurious Matouk towels and shower curtain play off the rusty-orange and blue color scheme.



*“I always do a mood board at the beginning of the year, and for 2020, the word ‘maximalism’ was at the top!”*

—DENISE MCGAHA



whole process, from the foundation up. Then 9/11 happened five days after the birth of our first child, and I needed to reinvent myself. I knew I wanted to return to a creative field with more flexibility.

**What did you come up with?** While I enjoyed building our home, I was very frustrated as well. I realized I could help that industry streamline their processes, work better with deadlines, and make the home-building experience more positive for everyone. I became a consultant for the industry and opened my own business, which combined my practical business sense with my eye for style. The tagline for my firm is “Designing with a Deadline.”

**What is your approach when working with clients?** I know designers say this a lot, but I strive for projects to feel authentic, like my clients, not my viewpoint (although I certainly state my opinion!). I want to be a storyteller and tell their story, incorporating their collections and heirlooms in the design while stretching them to go beyond the expected.

**What are some ideas we can expect from a McGaha-designed room?** I really strive for tension—high and low, found and fine, with layers and textures throughout and the push-pull of hard and soft in finishes and fabrics. I think every room needs a few rough edges. I am a huge believer in lighting. I think it can make or break a room.

**How do you achieve this tension?** I view decorating like a recipe. You can follow the recipe verbatim, and it will be fine, or you can put your touches in it—the secret ingredients—and it will be fabulous. I think 80% of design is



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## *in Bloom*

DECORATE: Q&A



“While the term ‘gallery wall’ seems overused, the concept is not. This is a mix of things my husband and I had bought but never hung. My guests will enjoy looking at these pieces because they are a reflection of our tastes,” says McGaha.

planned and 20% is improvisation—that’s where the magic happens. When clients understand that and see how I use my secret ingredients—those things that speak to me—they become more educated, trustful, and better understand the value of using an interior designer.

**The project we are featuring—a guest suite in your own home—is a testament to that thought process. Tell us about it.** A guest room is a great place to relax, have fun, and break rules. I wanted this guest suite to be a mix of things I love, such as the dramatic upholstered headboard and custom lampshades. The room also combines classic elements such as floral-print window treatments with more modern pieces such as the side tables. Above all, guest rooms should always be comfortable, so I include amenities—a coffee maker so they don’t have to go to the kitchen in their robes, a bedside charging station, snacks, and an Apple TV so they can watch their current Netflix obsession. And flowers are essential.

**Tell us what’s next for Denise McGaha Interiors?** I’m opening a new design studio on Dragon Street in Dallas, which will be part showroom as well. It’s going to have a presentation space with upholstered Fortuny walls and many other special features, but I don’t want to give away everything—you’ll have to see it for yourself! ✨