

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



Flower: 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 Brunschwig & 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



DUNN AND SONNIER
antiques · florals · gifts



*Quality antiques,
fresh flowers and plants,
fine gifts and décor...
For your home & every occasion.*

*3433 magazine st. | new orleans, la
(504) 524-3235*

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! ✨