

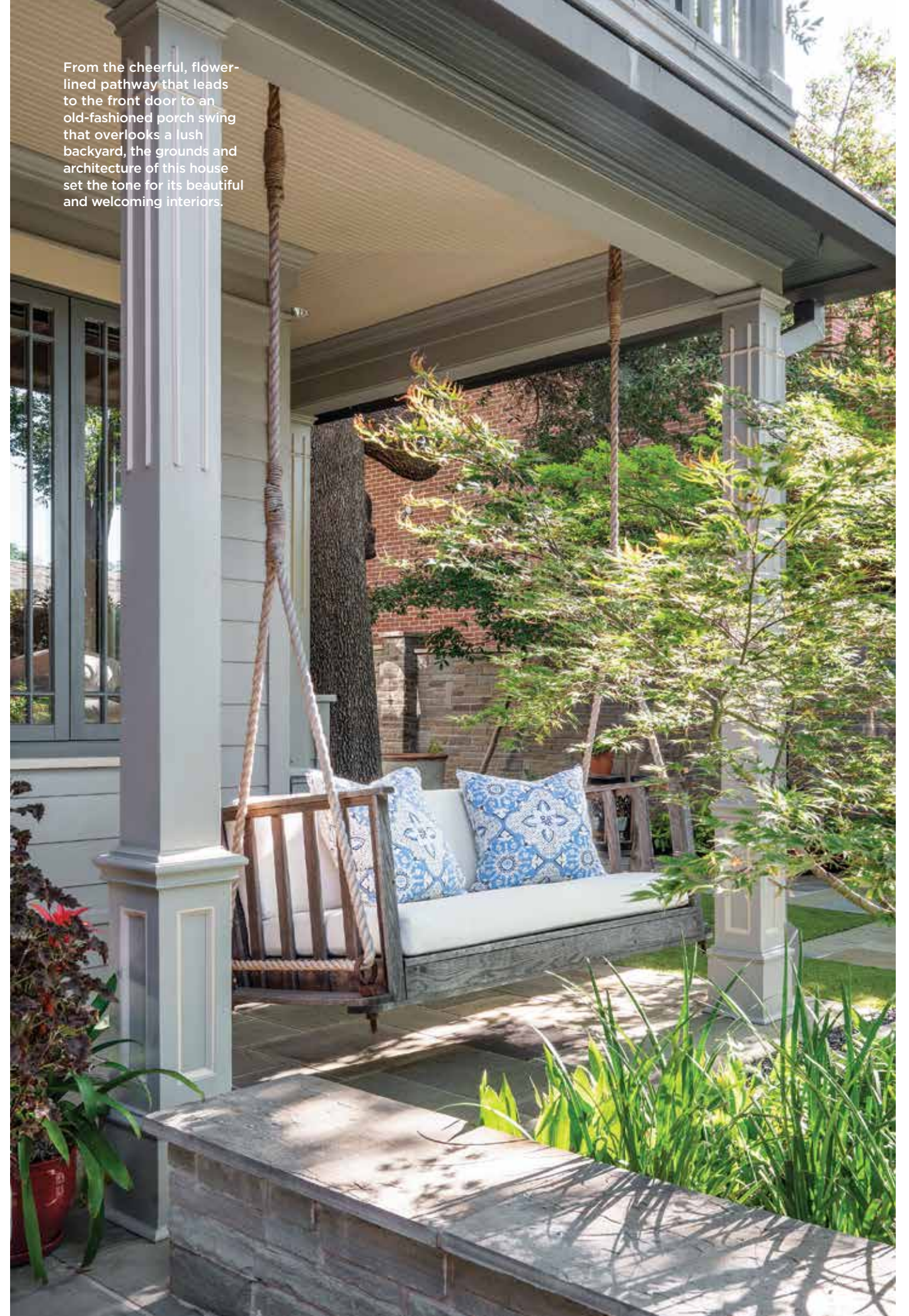


HIGHLAND PARK HANDSOME

Dallas designer Denise McGaha helps a couple breathe new life into an old house, respecting its charm and architectural details while giving it a fresh face with a light palette and sleek furnishings

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From the cheerful, flower-lined pathway that leads to the front door to an old-fashioned porch swing that overlooks a lush backyard, the grounds and architecture of this house set the tone for its beautiful and welcoming interiors.





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hen Jill and John Dale Cummings embarked on a search for a home in Highland Park, a Dallas enclave known for stately houses, manicured lawns, and broad tree-lined avenues, they didn't anticipate falling for the smallest house and narrowest lot on a prestigious street. But they were ultimately drawn toward the curb appeal and classic architecture of a house built in

RIGHT: The small entry illustrates the designer's approach to the project, a juxtaposition of clean-lined furnishings and period architectural details. Sunburst light by Visual Comfort.

BELOW RIGHT: In the living room, "guests can sit easily in a dress and heels, but it's also comfortable for big guys," says designer Denise McGaha. She also accommodated the couple's dogs, who love to sit on the sofa back to watch the world go by: "Performance fabrics make a white sofa possible, and a tight back means there are no cushions to fluff."
OPPOSITE: A linear Currey & Company fixture draws the eye through the dining room. The centerpiece features amaryllis, roses, 'Italian White' sunflowers, French tulips, wild grapevine, and wisteria. All floral designs by Jimmie Henslee.

1921, one of the oldest still standing in an area where most of its contemporaries have been torn down to make way for new, more imposing successors.

Although the house has been through additions, renovations, and updates over the years, its inherent charm remains firmly intact. A pristine but unpretentious clapboard exterior belies the spaciousness inside. Rooms open onto one another through wide archways ringed with simple but robust millwork; reclaimed wood floors feel organic and solid underfoot; and abundant natural light floods through casement windows throughout the day.

As designer Denise McGaha did an initial walk-through with her clients, she became equally enchanted. "When I stepped into the entry, with its original limestone floors that had just the right amount of patina, I could sense this house had a soul," she remembers. "I often work in new





construction, where it can be a bit challenging to create a sense of coziness and character. Here, that was already built in, which made my heart beat a little faster. We just needed to make it look like Jill and John Dale.”

Jill gave the designer a few simple but clear directives at the outset: no brown antiques or olive green. “I didn’t want things to look expected or like an old-house cliché,” she says. “I love a light backdrop, shades of blue, and furniture with clean lines. With the mature trees on the property, we’d see plenty of green through the windows.” Her husband’s only request was perhaps a little less specific: “Please Jill.”

Denise, whose work combines luxury and high style with a down-to-earth practicality that comes from her rural Texas upbringing, responded thoughtfully to suit not only the clients’ desires and lifestyle but the house itself. “A house always speaks to me and tells me what it needs,” she says.

The structural remedies were relatively minor, mainly confined to reconfiguring the primary bedroom to increase closet space. Decorative alterations included updating many of the finishes and replacing existing lighting. “Denise found the most beautiful contemporary fixtures that add interesting textures and

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: In the breakfast room, a window seat and café table provide a cozy spot for morning coffee. • The guest room is awash in texture and shades of blue and gray, contrasted with crisp white. • “We always have a lot of flowers in the house,” says John Dale. “They add so much to the character already here.” This arrangement features roses, gomphrena, and love-in-a-mist. **OPPOSITE:** In the kitchen, mirrored cabinets hide clutter and amplify the natural light. Stools by CR Laine; Circa Lighting pendant.





LEFT: In the primary bedroom, a Century bed upholstered in vinyl and layered with patterned textiles speaks to the designer's gift for marrying practicality with the decorative. Pierre Bear, one of the couple's poodles, clearly approves. Made Good bedside tables; floral pillow fabric from Thibaut. **OPPOSITE:** The soothing sound and Zen-like design of the backyard water features provide serenity and privacy, particularly desirable given the proximity of neighboring houses.

shapes," says Jill. Although the homeowner admits she had what she calls serious wallpaper anxiety, the designer advocated keeping the inherited grass cloth in the entry and dining room, and even brought in additional wallpaper for bedrooms and baths. "Anytime Denise pushed me a little outside my comfort zone, I took the leap and trusted her. Now, we love it all," says Jill.

Every design decision considered creature comforts, even for the four-legged ones named FiFi Ann and Pierre Bear, a pair of black poodles who have full run of the house and garden. Knowing that almost every surface needed to be able to withstand inevitable paw prints, Denise used a number of performance fabrics

that not only look stylish but also hold up to wear and tear.

The dogs frequently flow in and out, as do their owners. Living space extends into a backyard oasis, with porch swings and dining areas set amid stone-lined fountains and a pool. It's outside where John Dale, an avid lover of flowers and gardens, makes his own design statement as he pots containers for the pool area or plants colorful annuals (changed every season) in the lush beds framing the bluestone path that leads to the front door. He smiles, recalling a note he recently received from a neighbor. "She wanted to know the name of our landscape designer," he says. "I had to confess it was just me, but unfortunately I wasn't for hire." ❖



"When we're sitting outside and listening to the sounds of the water, it's so relaxing and peaceful. It's easy to forget we're in our own backyard."

—JILL CUMMINGS