

My Favorite Room



A Space 20 Years in the Making

by Mariana Rivas / photography by Claf Growald

Each time she visits a new room, award-winning interior designer Denise McGaha calls it a spiritual experience.

"It has to tell me what it needs," McGaha says. At first glance, one might think her living room told McGaha it needed variety, considering its mixture of textures, tones and shades of blue.

It can seem like a random hodgepodge of decorative items and furnishings accumulated over a long period of time to create a certain synergy, and that's exactly how McGaha wanted it. "It's taken me years to perfect the balance," she said. Finding harmony between different eras, colors and tones is a key part to her design style with Denise McGaha Interiors, her successful design firm, which she started in 2001.

Known for "designing on a deadline" of 90 days or less, McGaha wanted to bring order to the design world. But she kicked this strategy to the curb when it came to her own space, as it's taken over 20 years to get to what it looks like now.

"I don't give it enough time and attention like I do for my clients." For McGaha, clients always come first, even if it's at the expense of her own room. She said the couch has been in every possible location in the 20 years she's lived in her home, and collecting her favorite pieces didn't happen overnight. She found the blue-accented painting decorating her wall at a flea market in Paris about 15 years ago.



The room has evolved to become what McGaha describes as "collected, colorful and comfortable." The balance between style and comfort has been key for McGaha's design. She originally had a symmetrical layout in mind for the room, but, eventually, McGaha gave it a lot more space and didn't want it to look too curated. She realized with the changes that it "just feels a lot more approachable."

She said she didn't want the room to not be used. "It needed to feel not so formal that you didn't go in there," McGaha said.

Because she's a "family designer for life," McGaha's living room is special to each member of her family. With no TV, it's an apt space for family conversation.

And with two teenagers and four dogs, she wanted everyone to feel welcome. So that required an effortless blend of classic pieces with durability. The blue velvet scattered across the room is durable fabric made to last. Her glass coffee table and bar cart are vintage and one of a kind.

But McGaha doesn't just stick to vintage. She said she's "all about introducing the next new thing." If it's unique and has personality, chances are McGaha will add it to her collection. She said she loves to be ahead of the curve, and the living room is just one example.

McGaha thinks this space is where she can make the most impact as a designer because "it has life." 🏡