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Modernizing a Landmark

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A SLEEK TRANSFORMATION IN BATON ROUGE

*a talented designer
uplifts a traditional home*

When lobbyists Derrell Cohoon and Cheryl McCormick contacted award-winning interior designer Ty Larkins to discuss the redesign of their Baton Rouge home, they asked him to create a clean and elegantly modern interior that would be reminiscent of a New York City town home on the upper east side. The challenge in the transformation would be to fashion an updated interior that would blend in seamlessly with the historic architectural elements of the structure, which was built in 1875

by Lisa LeBlanc-Berry | photography by Chad Chenier, Chipper Hatter





Larkins began in the foyer, which was "drab and outdated." Although the existing staircase was clean and simple, the wooden finial affixed to the top of the newel post was the first thing to go in the redesign of the home. The heart pine flooring and stair threads were refinished to a deep, dark brown color that now extends throughout the foyer and the rest of the house. All of the walls and trim were painted white to contrast with the dark flooring in order to highlight the married couple's art collection, which had seemed lost in the darker colors that had been used throughout the house.

"Architecturally, I designed and installed columns in the foyer to visually and spatially delineate it further from the adjacent living room space," Larkin says. "The new foyer feels more intimate and architecturally substantial now and the new columns seem like they would have been original to the house. The previous foyer's path from the front door led straight to the door for the laundry room which was not a space anyone would want first-time visitors looking for the restroom to discover," he adds.

"Some designers or architects might have opted to relocate the laundry room, but I convinced my clients to visually make the door disappear by replacing the existing door to the laundry room with a concealed door. To further add to the deception, pieces of art from my clients' collection were affixed to the concealed door, which is barely perceptible from the smooth wall alongside of it."

Larkins positioned a console table with a bald eagle base and white slab top just below the staircase, which is arguably modern and traditional all at once. Cowhide benches and black marble lamps complete the simple yet elegant composition. "A modern glass fixture in the foyer offered just the right anecdote from what one might expect to find entering this old, dignified structure from the street," Larkins says. The fixture succeeds in setting the tone for the rest of the rooms. ●





The living room, previously dark, unremarkable, and appointed with traditional furnishings, was transformed into an elegant, light and airy room. "Since the space was going to be used for visiting with friends and family versus watching television, I was free to create something beautiful, without having to accommodate a television, which is usually a visual eyesore in any space," Larkins points out.

"Like the foyer, white was selected for the walls and trim of the living room," Larkins says. A monochromatic color scheme was selected for all the upholstery pieces and window treatments in an effort to place visual emphasis on his clients' art collection, which brings in all the color and pattern needed for the space.

A large, contemporary painting by Alex Harvie was placed over the sofa, which is a modern reinterpretation of a classic Chesterfield sofa upholstered in a taupe velvet. Similarly, the club chairs were upholstered in taupe linen and off-white leather, all gradations of the same color. "A large, nine-panel mirror with antique glass was placed between two windows to visually expand the space, and a bit of the unexpected was achieved by layering the mirror with two framed pieces from my clients' art collection," he adds.

The dramatic mirror was suspended with an invisible fishline, making it appear to float in thin air. Larkins added a "clean-lined but classic" dark walnut coffee table, which was implemented to warm up the all-white space. A gold leafed Moroccan drum shade chandelier illuminates the stately table.

"My clients' main request was that their new dining room be stylish and chic, while being comfortable enough to sit and visit with friends for hours," Larkins states. "In addition, my clients owned a crystal Baccarat chandelier purchased at auction years earlier, which I was required to incorporate seamlessly into the design."

A six-foot-round oak dining room table was selected for durability. It is paired with an enormous, pale wood Georgian floor mirror that adds a bold and intriguing element to the space. Positioned in front of the mirror is a console table outfitted with table lamps with crystal bases, thereby repeating the crystal in the chandelier. ➤





According to Larkins, "The *piece de resistance* for the dining space is undoubtedly a hand-painted floor medallion I designed; it was executed by artist Sally Conklin. The medallion was designed with the base of the table in mind, and the two work tremendously well together to reinforce the circular motion of the dining area. The small painting over the fireplace is by artist Alex Harvie," he adds.

Perhaps the most dramatic change of all occurred with the smallest space in the house, the half bath. The diminutive room is less than 25 square feet. "I was charged with making it stunning, a tall task given the spatial shortcomings and the outdated condition of this tiny room," Larkins recalls. The old-fashioned pinstriped walls and outdated fixtures were replaced by a dramatic, solid black color and contemporary fixtures and flourishes.

"I believe that for spaces in which the owners spend the least amount of time, the more dramatic the design should be," Larkins point out. "Therefore, I devised a plan which involved paneling the walls in a very formal way and lacquering them in high gloss black paint."

For contrast, a mosaic marble floor was installed and finished off with an "old school," vintage-style washstand with a white Carrera marble countertop and a polished nickel base with polished nickel faucet fittings. Finally, wall sconces with linen shades were installed in the paneled niches for glamour and a touch of elegance.

The family room redesign had its challenges, however modest compared to the kitchen. "The main drawbacks with the existing family room were all the spatial deficiencies of the space, namely, the location of the back door leading to the yard, which essentially made any sensible furniture arrangement nearly impossible. Therefore, I convinced my clients to relocate the back door several feet over to the left, which created a flat wall upon which a sofa could be positioned," Larkins states.

"Similarly, a window was also removed to create a space for artwork over the sofa. This space is also open to the kitchen so that the television, concealed in a stunning 1940s French-style cabinet covered in vellum, could be viewed from anywhere in the space."

A pair of matching sofas upholstered in khaki linen face each other in the redesigned kitchen, flanked by comfortable club chairs upholstered in gray taupe velvet. Finally, a custom, hand-blocked grasscloth wall covering was installed on one wall to add contrast and visual interest.









PHOTOS THIS PAGE BY CHAO CHENIER

Larkins points out that the most challenging space to redesign was by far the kitchen space, which was gutted to the studs. New cabinets, countertops, and appliances were installed to make the newly designed configuration more efficient and user friendly. "Stylistically, my clients asked for a modern kitchen, but I was concerned about making sure a modern kitchen fit the context of this historic home. Therefore, I devised a hybrid modern/traditional kitchen," Larkins says.

The lower cabinets were designed with modern European flat front doors wearing modern Scandinavian cabinet pulls. In an effort to "reference" the historic context of the home, the upper cabinets were designed in the traditional Shaker style, with frame inlay doors wearing traditional pulls and hardware.

"The countertops are 'Absolute Black' honed granite and the walls are finished in a classic white subway tile," Larkins point out. A nonfunctioning fireplace hearth was "played up" by covering it in subway tile and was outfitted with a modern, custom-made "floating" fireplace mantel fabricated out of quarter-sawn white oak. In lieu of framed art, a chalkboard, cleverly used as a message board, is positioned on the fireplace mantel. Finally, artist-created lighting pendants fabricated out of copper add a touch of the unexpected to this very classic/modern/traditional kitchen space.

Larkins modestly concludes, "My broad task was essentially to update the architecture in a more modern, 21st-century kind of way, without destroying the built-in character of this wonderful old relic." Like a fairy godmother waving a magic wand, Larkins ingeniously transformed what was once a rather plain and unexceptional old-fashioned interior into an elegant, vibrant, and contemporary residence that recalls the finest upscale dwellings of Manhattan. ♦