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DESIGNER J. RANDALL POWERS CRAFTS A MONUMENTAL HOUSE IN HOUSTON THAT BALANCES THE PRINCIPLES OF CLASSIC DESIGN WITH A GRACIOUS SENSE OF INTIMACY.



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Choice antiques and eye-catching art make a visual statement outside the master bedroom. Chair, Michael Taylor; pendant, Dennis & Leen; lamp, Visual Comfort; 18th-century French chest of drawers; walls in Clunch, Farrow & Ball; flooring, Lueders Limestone; art, Sherie' Franssen. OPPOSITE: Boxwood hedges line the entrance of the house, which is clad in limestone. Sconces, Paul Ferrante.



RANDY POWERS COULDN'T SLEEP. THE HOUSTON DECORATOR WAS UP AT TWO IN THE MORNING, WORRIED ABOUT A TABLE FOR A DINING ROOM.

But not just any dining room. It was for one of his most involved commissions to date. It had to be the perfect table, utterly unique—and it had to be able to accommodate up to 26 in a pinch.

The cold-sweat wake-ups would happen again and again in the 14 months it took him to furnish this capacious home. ("I went completely gray-haired during the project," says the gregarious Powers.) Built from scratch in Houston's tony River Oaks neighborhood, the house was a highly detailed undertaking of Texas-size proportions, encased in limestone walls and a copper roof, with a subterranean garage for 14 cars that doubles as a ballroom—polished floors, pilasters, and all.

Powers was called in just as the manse's elegant exterior, a light-footed dance between French and Italian styles, was finished. On a drizzly Houston morning, he pulled on a pair of rubber Wellington boots and walked the entire house, alone. "I didn't want anybody to meet me there," he says. "I just wanted to take it all in." He was struck by the rooms' comfortable proportions, but not surprised. He knew the couple—one of their daughters had been an intern at his interior design firm—as philanthropists whom he calls "very down-to-earth," with two grown daughters and an increasing number of grandchildren.



The dining room, with its gleaming touches and crisp, graphic walls, is a study in modern elegance. Custom table, Rose Tarlow Melrose House; chairs, Thomas W. Morgan; chandelier, Dennis & Leen; lamps, Visual Comfort; walls in a Cameron Textiles silk velvet; custom rug, Stark. OPPOSITE, FROM TOP: Sofa in a Pierre Frey fabric, Cameron Collection; armchairs, Gregorius Pineo; stool in a Vervain fabric, Dennis & Leen; coffee table, Erika Brunson; tables, Dessin Fournir; curtains in a Fortuny fabric; walls in Pink Ground, Farrow & Ball; art, John Pavlicek. Custom table, Rose Tarlow Melrose House; pendants, Dennis & Leen; sconces, Nesle.

THIS HOUSE WAS TO BE SOMETHING LASTING, POWERS SAYS—SOMETHING THAT, “IN 200 YEARS, WILL STILL BE HERE.”

White accents, from the upholstery to the sculptural objects, give the family room a light, low-key look. Sofa in a Pierre Frey fabric, Cameron Collection; armchair in a Jerry Pair suede, Dennis & Leen; coffee tables and sconces, Formations; side tables, Rose Tarlow Melrose House; curtains in a Holland & Sherry wool; walls in a KFI silk; art, Cleve Gray.



Custom-made mirrored surfaces transform a powder room into a glittering space. **LEFT:** Cabinet and mirrors, John Himmel Decorative Arts; sink and fittings, Daum for THG; sconces, Niemann Weeks. **BELOW:** Antique English ladder; 17th-century Italian carved-wood table, Therien & Co.; custom table, Rose Tarlow Melrose House.



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Which precisely explains his self-inflicted pressure. “Furnishings come and go,” Powers says, “but I wanted to ensure that the house itself had historical references for the future—that 50, 70, or even 100 years from now, new owners would say, ‘We could never change that. That’s original to the house.’”

Nothing is conventional here. A powder room has been fully fitted—walls, moldings, even the vanity—in mirror. The long, tubular footrest at a bar has been rendered in glass, not wood. “Every wall has been papered, lacquered, upholstered, or mirrored,” Powers says. “Every single molding is glazed, striéd, or stressed in some fashion. There is a ton of trompe l’oeil work. For one year, I had a crew of decorative painters in the house.” In the paneled library, Powers sent another team in. “They were in there for weeks, hand-waxing the walnut, to ensure that it had a patina.”

With the shell fully refined, Powers began stirring in the furnishings, art, and accessories, virtually all of it acquired



Waxed woods add a layer of patina to the library. Sofas in a Lee Jofa fabric, Cameron Collection; pillows in a Classic Cloth fabric; chandelier, Therien & Co.; task light, Cedric Hartman; floor lamp, Dessin Fournir; curtains in a Holland & Sherry fabric; rug, Scott Group.

Luxe wallpapers with a subtle sheen envelop the wife's bath. Chairs, Patina; tub, Lalique for THG; chandelier and sconces, Nesle; walls and ceiling in Gracie papers; shade in a Classic Cloth silk taffeta. **OPPOSITE:** Bench in a guest bedroom, Formations; bedding, Leontine Linens; canopy in a Schumacher print trimmed with an Houlès fabric; lamp, Visual Comfort; mirror, Dennis & Leen; walls in a Rogers & Goffigon fabric.





for the home. ("We brought just two sconces and a chair from the previous house," he says.) Early on, Powers and the wife settled on the color scheme, divined from "the most unusual marble I'd ever seen," he says. It was the top of an 18th-century gilded table, "peachy, rosy, corally cognac. I said, 'That's our palette. That's what we have to make it from.'"

The resulting quiet hues telegraph the low-key nature of the couple. "We're pretty casual people," she says. Powers concurs: "They want their grandkids to run around the house and skateboard down the hallway. Nothing is off-limits."

And when they sit down to dinner with that growing brood, they are together around the perfect table. It finally came to Powers: 17 feet long, Regency in style, and finished in crackled lacquer, its top japanned with Siamese fighting fish swimming about. Powers obsessed about those, too. He flew to the maker's shop in California to draw the outline of each fish in chalk. He felt he owed it to the house.

"This," he recalls thinking, "has got to be the best dining table you've ever seen in your life." □



The courtyard is planted with olive trees and beds of impatiens; flooring, Lueders Limestone. OPPOSITE, FROM TOP: Chair in an antique fabric and custom bed, Rose Tarlow Melrose House; headboard in a Cameron Textiles fabric; bedside chests, Dessin Fournir; lamps, Christopher Spitzmiller; stool, Cameron Collection. Armchairs and ottomans in a Larsen fabric; floor lamps, Dessin Fournir; table, Rose Tarlow Melrose House; curtains in a Fortuny fabric; carpet, Scott Group. For more details, see Sourcebook.



TABLET
BONUS

Gilded detailing on the sweeping staircase provides a grand entrance. Chandelier, Therien; piano, Steinway; antique sconces; walls in Dimity, Farrow & Ball.



TABLET
BONUS

An antiqued-glass mirror serves as backdrop for a tableau of treasured objects. Mirror, Michael Taylor; chest, Rose Tarlow Melrose House; lamp, Vaughan; walls in Pink Ground, Farrow & Ball.



The master bedroom features a gracious terrace with a view of the garden. Chairs and ottoman in a DeLany & Long fabric, McKinnon and Harris; pendant and sconce, Paul Ferrante.

TABLET
BONUS

TABLET
BONUS

Oversize topiaries add height and a touch of whimsy to the rose garden. With additional plantings of magnolia and boxwood.

