

Southern Comfort

A young couple nourishes their love of the South by filling their California home with a sophisticated mix of antiques and family-friendly pieces.

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A generously sized antique gilt-wood chandelier draws the eye in Tiffany and Philip Rivers' dining room. "It's simple and makes the room more dramatic," designer Meredith McBrearty says. Changing the fabric to a casual stripe on the back of the dining chairs relaxes the room's formality.



Hot summer days spent lazing

on the porch swing, light-filled interiors rounded out with antiques and traditional pieces, a general sense of happiness and comfort—these are the childhood memories Tiffany Rivers carried with her as she and her husband, San Diego Chargers quarterback Philip Rivers, launched an exhaustive house search in the San Diego area.

In Tiffany's mind, nothing—not even the roughly 1,700 miles between her native Alabama and Southern California—could shake that vision of what a home should be. The only unresolved question was how to translate those warm memories into reality. Eventually the couple decided on a newer Spanish-style home that seemed, well, doable. They loved the floor plan, which included wide glass doors that opened rooms to the outdoors, and could envision raising their children there. But the dark cabinetry and décor felt oppressive—a world apart from the Southern homes Tiffany adored. “Everything seemed so heavy and serious,” Tiffany says. “I talked with designers, but I could never really describe what it was that I wanted. I guess it was more of a feeling.”



So who better to interpret that feeling than a fellow Southerner?

Designer Meredith McBrearty, who has known the couple since childhood, spoke the same language—one that valued timelessness, lightness, character, and history. She whitewashed the interior, sweeping walls and cabinets in creamy whites and pale beiges. To keep the lightness intact and layer on visual warmth, she ushered in a palette of pale turquoise and peach. Antiques, many purchased in New Orleans and other Southern cities, give the illusion that things have been passed down through generations. “While almost everything in the house is new to Tiffany and Philip,” McBrearty says, “many pieces are old, which creates an instant feeling that they have lived in and loved this house for forever.”

The Southern sensibility was just part of the equation. With five children under the age of 8, the décor needed to wear well, too. “Their home is the heartbeat of their family,” McBrearty says. “Things needed to be durable for their very, very active lifestyle.”

She mastered those needs by freshening rooms with a few splashes of lime, toughening some seat cushions and chair backs with easy-clean vinyl, and partnering modern pieces—such as the living room's curvaceous coffee table—with antiques. “We have the best of both worlds—sophisticated and kid-friendly,” Tiffany says.

And there's a lot of living in the Rivers' home. Some afternoons, when schoolwork is done, Tiffany pulls out her formal china and hosts a tea party for her girls and their dolls in the dining room. It's her way of passing along the Southern manners and etiquette that her parents instilled in her. Morning to night, the covered stone patio and backyard also gets a workout. It's where the Rivers' 7-year-old daughter curls up on the daybed-inspired swing to practice reading, footballs get tossed around, or the family glimpses hot-air balloons in the evening sky. Most important, every space—indoors and out—gives the Rivers family a sense of peace. “Before it was just a house,” Tiffany says. “Now it's home.”

This photo: A modern lacquered coffee table and chair slipcovered in lime velvet give the formal living room a youthful energy. Yards of fabric in the same creamy hue as the walls soften the expansive windows without distracting from the welcoming garden views beyond.

Opposite: The home is accessed via a stone courtyard, where urns and clay pots add old-world character.





McBrearty placed an extra-long bench in front of the limestone fireplace to create a cozy spot to lounge. An antique mirror hangs from a chain above the fireplace. It's deliberately tilted down to reflect light into the room. Framed wall murals bring all of the room's hues together.





Clockwise from top left: Dining chairs cuddled up to a Spanish trestle table in the kitchen reflect McBrearty's kid-friendly creativity; the backs are covered in linen, creating a pretty look from behind, while the seats and fronts feature vinyl that's easy to wipe clean. Drapery panels and deep-seating pieces transform the loggia into a cozy alfresco room. The 1920 Italian screen in the bedroom sitting area was one of McBrearty's inspiration points for the home's palette. Antique gilt-wood candlesticks with the left to stand up to the living room's grand scale rest on top of a 19th-century Italian console. Cream paint on perimeter cabinets and pale robin's-egg blue on the island cabinets lightened the kitchen's original dark oak cabinetry. The teak daybed-inspired swing—a modern take on a traditional porch swing—is roomy enough to fit the whole family.



A mix of classic patterns, timeworn pieces, and

fresh accents sets a warm and gracious mood throughout the house.



Left: An antique neoclassic writing desk tucks neatly between two banks of French doors in the master bedroom. **Below:** Two-tone curtain panels cocoon the four-poster in the master bedroom. "They make the room feel cozy and comfortable, and bring the scale down," McBrearty says. Ivory damask on the outside panels keeps the look serene. Pillow shams carry the peach and blue color scheme to the bedding. The patterned fabric was hand-printed in Italy. Damask draperies, which appear to have been brushed with watercolors, add a touch of romance to the room's French doors.

