



Art and Soul

Love transformed a tobacco-stained townhome into a calm, creative sanctuary. *Allison Hersh* explores a curated collaboration.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY RICHARD LEO JOHNSON

When fine artist Daniel E. Smith and building contractor Matthew Hallett first toured the three-story townhome overlooking Crawford Square, the thick, acrid smell of stale cigarettes almost knocked them back.

“It was horrible,” Daniel recalls, shaking his head at the memory. “Absolutely horrible.”

All the same, the pair knew they’d found home.

Their real estate broker tried to talk them out of buying the run-down property, which had been vacant for more than two years. But Daniel and Matthew persisted. They knew this 1981 structure, a historically sensitive infill on a quiet street on the eastern edge of Savannah’s National Historic Landmark District, had serious potential.

The couple loved the location and could see past the shag carpet, popcorn ceilings, carpeted stairs, violet trim and teal doors. Confident that they could give this dilapidated structure an extreme home makeover, Matthew and Daniel envisioned a stylish sanctuary that would reflect their shared passion for modernity and creativity.

“We liked everything about the house—except the house,” Matthew laughs. “And we knew we could fix that.”

AN OPEN OUTLOOK

Matthew immediately put his design and contracting skills to work. He mapped out a new layout for the 2,680-square-foot structure, which includes a garden-level apartment

THE SMITH/HALLETT STATS

Owners: Daniel E. Smith and Matthew Hallett
Year built: 1981 (built to resemble a 19th century Savannah row house)
Year purchased: 2011
Square footage: 1,920 main house; 760 garden-level apartment
Accommodations: 2 bedrooms, 2.5 baths in the main house; 1 bedroom, 1 bath in the garden-level apartment
Time to complete: 1 year



FEAST YOUR EYES: In the dining room (above and opposite page), Matthew installed a lighting fixture with thin, pendulous filaments. He intentionally removed the glass globes to reveal the bare bulbs. “To me, they look like floating candles,” he muses. Matthew and Daniel, who share a passion for midcentury modern style, enjoy hosting intimate dinners with their supper club friends, lounging in metal mesh armchairs and trading stories around the sleek table.

TREAT YOURSELF: (right) Throughout the renovation process, Matthew worked within the existing footprint of the townhouse, with one notable exception. He longed to create an eat-in nook with a bay window. With permission from Savannah’s Historic Review Board, he bumped the second-floor wall out several feet to make room. Today, this cozy nook is Matthew’s favorite space in the house. “It’s tiny, but it made the biggest change,” he raves. “I love eating breakfast and dinner here.”

that was once home to The Lady Chablis, a central character in John Berendt’s bestselling *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*.

An experienced builder, Matthew decided to eliminate a bedroom and bath upstairs, add a breakfast nook with bay windows, knock out several interior walls and remove the seven-foot ceilings in the kitchen.

His mantra, from the start, was “light and bright.”

“I feel confined by a lot of walls,” he explains, “so I added French doors and plenty of windows and skylights.”

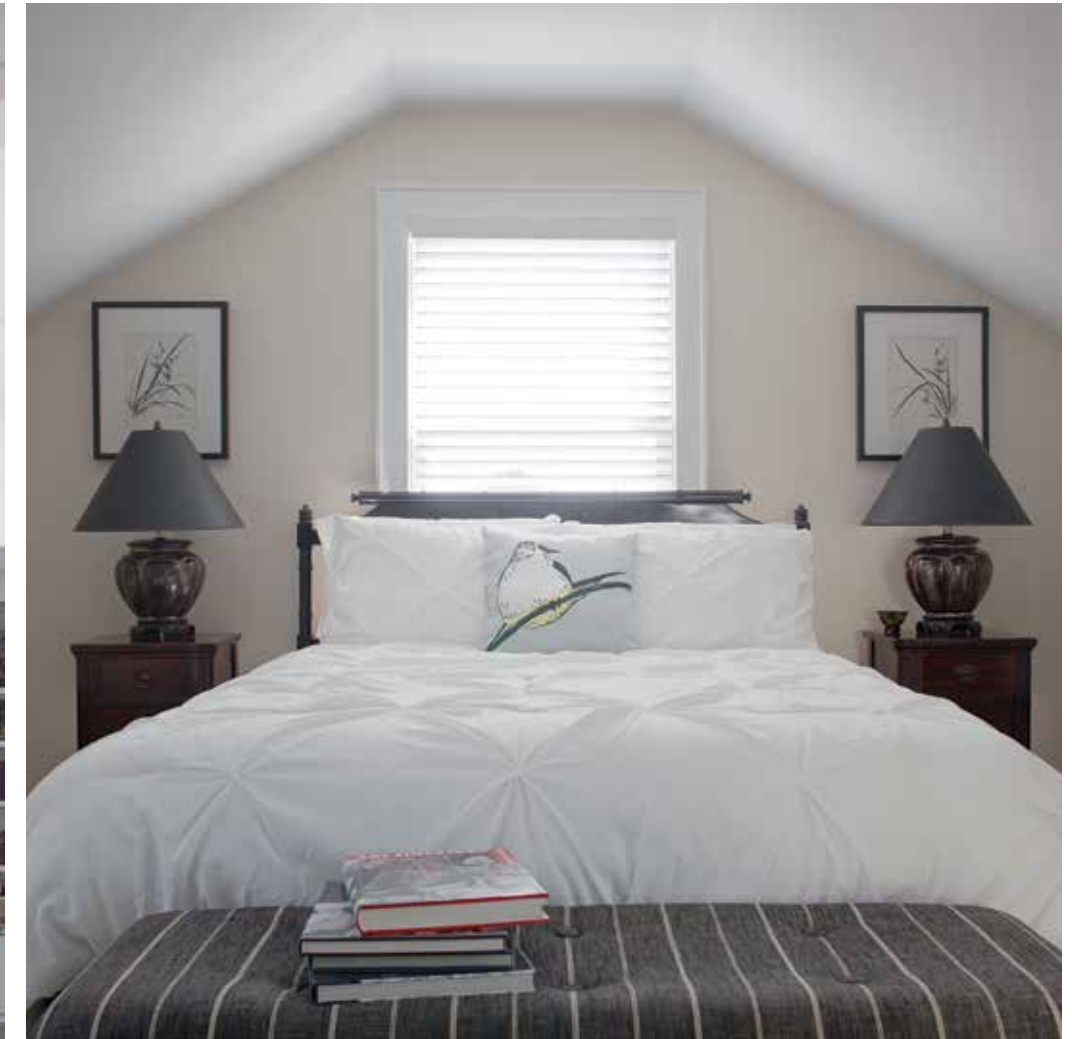
The planning process took six months, as did the renovation itself, which required taking the remaining walls all the way down to the studs.

“We gutted the house,” Daniel recalls—and he’s not exaggerating. “We even had to remove the insulation because it was so saturated with tobacco.”

Since Daniel loves to cook and entertain, Matthew paid special attention to the kitchen during the renovation, adding sumptuous Carrera marble countertops and sleek, high-gloss white cabinetry. He chose white-on-white geometric tile from Mexico to make an artful backsplash, contrasting sharply with



Although Matthew took the lead on the renovation project, Daniel never doubted he was in good hands. “When Matthew does a space, I’m always comfortable with it,” he smiles.



the ebonized oak floors. The end result is a functional yet understated space that can take center stage at mealtime or recede into the background when not in use.

In the living room, modernist-inspired furniture benefits from contemporary, plush finishes. A silver velvet sofa from 24e commands attention with its richly studded surfaces. A caramel-colored leather chaise offers an instant escape from the ordinary. French armchairs have been strategically re-upholstered and arranged to frame a white cowhide rug. An elegant Carrera marble fireplace is surrounded by Daniel's extensive collection of art books and original sculpture.

Although Matthew took the lead on the renovation project, Daniel never doubted he was in good hands.

"When Matthew does a space, I'm always comfortable with it," he smiles. "We always like the same things."

THE ART OF LIVING

Daniel and Matthew appreciate the fact that their home provides a meditative escape, serving as a peaceful haven in the heart of downtown Savannah.

"We're quiet people," Matthew confides. "I deal with people all day long, so when I get home, I like to have a nice quiet space."

MAKE IT SIZZLE: With its subdued black-and-white palette and clean urban style, the kitchen renovation (opposite page) is a focal point of the home. Matthew tore out an interior wall and a pass-through that once separated the living room from the kitchen, creating one bright, open space. "The simple shapes read like a Mondrian," Daniel raves. "The kitchen is more like a sculpture than a work space."



Daniel's original compositions adorn nearly every wall, providing a welcome glimpse into the creative impulse. Works by local artists Julio Garcia, Gerome Temple and Mary Hartman also are thoughtfully interwoven throughout the home.

PERFECT PEACE: The third-floor master bedroom (opposite page) is anchored by a dramatic four-poster king-sized bed Matthew and Daniel built by hand. A comfortable sitting room nearby sports the home's only television, a flat-screen TV. "My only request was that I didn't want to see the side of the TV from the bed," Daniel confides. Matthew's creative solution? A custom curved wall that makes the TV "disappear."

THE SMITH/HALLETT REFERRALS

- Engineering:** Cody Tharpe, Tharpe Structural Design Group
- Interior designer:** Matthew Hallett, Ellsworth-Hallett Home Professionals
- Contractor/builder:** Ellsworth-Hallett Home Professionals
- Tile:** Garden State Tile
- Paint:** Alchemy Restoration, using Sherwin-Williams paint
- Windows/doors:** Carl Kleinsteuber, Guerry Lumber Co.
- Kitchen/bath design:** Matthew Hallett, Ellsworth-Hallett Home Professionals
- Lighting design:** Lisa Dixon, Pace Lighting
- Electrician:** Tom Stephenson, Next Generation Electric
- Carpenter:** Ellsworth-Hallett Home Professionals
- Plumber:** Eric DeLong, Plumb Reliable
- Plumbing fixtures:** Sandpiper Supply
- HVAC:** Aaction Air
- Furniture:** Velvet couch from 24e, caramel leather chaise from Arcanum, antique French chairs reupholstered with hide covering by Arcanum
- Appliances:** Livingoods
- Art:** Personal collection featuring original work by Daniel E. Smith, Mary Hartman, Julio Garcia and Gerome Temple

The white walls provide a relaxing backdrop, but they also double as a blank surface to showcase Daniel's abstracted landscape and architectural paintings. His original compositions adorn nearly every wall, providing a welcome glimpse into the creative impulse. Works by local artists Julio Garcia, Gerome Temple and Mary Hartman also are thoughtfully interwoven throughout the home, telling a larger story about the couple's taste, style and interests.

Out back, a covered porch offers the perfect place to enjoy a drink as the sun sets. The intimate courtyard garden reveals a bubbling fountain and a table for outdoor dining amid a cascade of lush ornamental plants.

Daniel and Matthew have lived in 10 different places over the course of their 17-year relationship, but they agree that this house truly feels like home.

"We love living here," Matthew declares. "To me, you can't improve on this house. It's absolutely perfect." ■

