





A photograph of a living room interior. In the foreground, a dark wood armchair with a striped cushion is partially visible. Behind it, a sofa covered in a brown and white plaid fabric is positioned. To the left of the sofa is a small round wooden table holding a white bowl, a stack of books, and a large yellow candle. In the background, a tall dark wood hutch or bookshelf stands against the wall, filled with various items. Two framed pictures hang on the wall to the left of the hutch. The floor is covered with a striped rug.

# The Simple Plan

A new Houston home shows off effortless elegance that will improve with age.

Interior design by Ginger Barber

Text by Wendy Grossman

Photography by Janet Lenzen





**R**oberta Stanwood was walking her dog when she noticed a lot for sale just three doors down from her brick home in Houston's West University area (an upscale neighborhood located near Rice University). For years, the speech pathologist had cut out pictures in the newspaper of homes built by South Hampton Builders—she loved their work. She saw it was their sign on the empty lot and called, but when she looked at the home's design, she couldn't see herself in it. Nor, she thought, did she need a new house.

But then she started running into the builder everywhere she went, from the grocery store to the post office. After three months of run-ins, she took a second look at the plans. She envisioned a few minor changes—the addition of a spiral wrought-iron staircase leading from the master bedroom to the pool and a stairway from the second floor to the attic exercise room—and the home began to feel like hers.

Construction on the Mediterranean-style home began as soon as Stanwood's 21-year-old daughter left to start college at Ole Miss. She moved in July 2005. From the project's beginning, achieving a personal sense of style was the goal. As a single woman, she could design the home to be all her own, but the Country French-style relics from her previous home seemed impossible to integrate.

**Opening spread:** The family room fireplace is made of reclaimed roof tiles from Italy. "I'm a real proponent of neutral interiors," says Ginger Barber, who used neutral colors—beige, brown, blue and cream—throughout her client's Houston home. The room's radius corners have no trim or crown molding, allowing for one color throughout.

**Left:** A curved sea grass-covered staircase leads to the second floor. The foyer has an open loggia feel to include the patio and pool areas that are visually a part of the entry.

**Right:** An antique blue cabinet in the dining room influenced colors throughout the house. The dining table is topped in Texas limestone. Above the table, Barber added an elegant antique chandelier made of iron and crystal. "We needed the simple formality above the table to contrast with the primitive painted cupboard," Barber says.











Stanwood called interior designer Ginger Barber, who had designed her last home. "I asked Ginger, 'Will my furniture go?'"

Barber knew the existing furniture was adaptable. "We did make some changes to some of the pieces," she says, "but by buying the pieces we did, the quality was there. By buying right, clients are able to easily transition into a new home."

Barber says that the dining room's large antique painted cupboard drove the touches of blue throughout the house. She added blue slipcovers to the dining room chairs, and stained the pine chairs a dark chocolate. The addition of deep-brown antiques anchored the room's rustic, Tuscan feeling.

A corner cabinet holds the brown-and-white Transferware Stanwood began collecting eight years ago. Barber drew browns from the teapot and plates for use in furnishings throughout the house.

Barber's signature style is calm, neutral colors. She doesn't like it when rooms are over-decorated, and she emphasizes the difference between interior design and decorating. "Less is more," she says. "I love mixing collections of painted furniture, stone fragments, old wood, woven baskets; all of those natural elements create calm without adding too much flash and ornament. It's easy to live with and it doesn't look 'decorated.' In the true sense, it just looks lived in. It is driven by clients' decisions—I want them to love everything we buy. It's very important to me that the client love the process and love the home."

For Stanwood, "We did everything we could to make the home look like it wasn't new," Barber says. She achieved the transformation by integrating natural materials

**Left:** In the family room, colors in the brown-checked overstuffed chair and the brown-striped chair are taken from Stanwood's Transferware collection. A blue-and-cream striped antique dhurrie rug provides a soft covering for the stone floor.

**Right:** The kitchen's backsplash is made of 300-year-old antique Italian tile. Eighteenth-century reclaimed stone floors imported from the Bars de Beaucaire region of France by Houston's Chateau Domingue top the kitchen island.











**Left:** An old Italian trunk rests in the hallway leading to the master bath. "We needed to address the space without over-furnishing it," says Barber. "Seeing trunks in European hallways is very common, mainly for storage. It's just enough to catch a book, but not take away from the architecture."

**This page:** Barber dressed upstairs tabletops with simple, primitive items. "To have the heads there just adds an angelic touch," she says of a side table's arrangement. "There's something very peaceful about them; they add a positive spirit to the home."







The living room leads to an outdoor summer kitchen made from antique, octagonal terra cotta. Orange and lemon trees, pomegranates, bougainvillea and rosemary surround a small lap pool. Large antique olive containers were imported from France. Antique doors lead from the pool to the garage.

throughout the residence. The ground-level floors, stretching from the entrance, through the kitchen and living room, outside and around the pool, are limestone imported from Israel. The designer says limestone will stay cool in hot Houston summers, plus, the material looks better with age—unlike wood. The stone also provides a neutral backdrop for the first-floor living areas.

In the kitchen, Barber blended reclaimed materials with high-tech appliances. “I’m a kitchen person,” says Stanwood, who spends much of her free time baking. Her favorite part of the new kitchen is the 300-year-old Italian tile backsplash behind the Viking range.

“The wonderful finds drive our ideas,” Barber says. “The amount of tile drove the design decision.” Though Barber only found a few pieces of the antique tiles Roberta’s fondness for them made the designer find a use for them in the backsplash. “It’s far more special than having a lot of it. It’s really art,” says Barber.

The kitchen island, with a small, circular vegetable sink is topped with 18th-century reclaimed stone floors imported from the Bars de Beaucaire region of France.

“A lot of people are doing this Tuscany theme—a lot of people do it—but they don’t do the real thing,” Barber says. After waiting months for many of the home’s materials and furnishings to arrive from overseas, “Roberta’s got the real thing,” assures the designer.

Another key design decision was the elimination of a formal living room—Stanwood says that her living room at her last home, while very pretty, was only used at holiday parties or while she was waiting for a friend to pick her up.

Barber emphasizes that the home doesn’t make “you feel like you can’t touch anything—it’s very lived-in and relaxed,” she says. “All she does is add roses and candlelight and you could be black tie.”

Stanwood says she now spends time taking away objects instead of adding more to her home. “I like that it’s not a cluttered house,” she says. “Life is cluttered enough.” TH&L