

GEOMETRY LESSON

A math teacher-turned-interior designer filled her Houston home with shapes and forms that speak to her

INTERIOR DESIGN BY *Jill Egan*
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Opening spread: The entry of Jill Egan's new Houston home, for which she did all of the interior design, makes a statement about her penchant for neutral hues and minimalist aesthetics. A wooden Swedish chair, circa 1920s, is paired with a Kelly Wearstler marble stool. The monochromatic artwork, essentially a composition of carved paper, is by Lauren Collin. This spread: In the living room, a pair of Christian Liaigre sofas are upholstered with Arabel linen. The sphere pillows use a Pierre Frey fabric.



Left: The oak kitchen table from Provence dates from the seventeenth century. Swedish milking stools are used as seats. The bridge faucet is from Barber Wilsons & Co. This page: The homeowner is especially fond of the narrow, eighteenth-century dining table because it allows guests to be closer to one another. The chairs are upholstered in linen from Larsen. An eighteenth-century Swedish apothecary cabinet is used to store china. The cast bronze and crystal chandelier is by Ochre.

When configuring the layout of the kitchen, architect Kirby Mears put the Sub-Zero refrigerator in the butler's pantry, so that guests gathering in the kitchen would respond to the room as an entertainment space. The Van Cronenburg hardware is handcrafted in Belgium. Most of the shelving, which dates from the nineteenth century, comes from a French bistro.





The chandeliers in the master bedroom are by the Australian lighting designer Christopher Boots. The brass rings feature pieces of quartz crystal that are magnetically held in place. Glant fabrics are used on the bed. The oversized Euro pillows are in a Holly Hunt Great Plains fabric and the bolster is in a Castel velvet. The linen Roman shades are de Le Cuona. The massive nineteenth-century French mantelpiece necessitated steel supports in the floor below.

JILL EGAN IS good at math. Prior to becoming an interior designer, she taught geometry to high schoolers, so shapes of all kinds appeal to her. When she and her husband were planning the construction of their new house in Houston, she imagined the ovals and arcs, rectangles and squares, right and acute angles, and, of course, the straight lines that she could incorporate into her interiors.

"I've always been attracted to shapes," she says. Fortunately, Houston architect Kirby Mears, by nature of his profession, also likes varying forms, and he and Egan embarked on a successful collaboration. She calls Kirby "my idol" for his ability to realize what she envisioned for her home. "Kirby has an attention to detail that is as keen as mine, and he possesses a similar design aesthetic."

Egan's house is situated on a very busy Houston street, across from Rice University. And yet, to be inside the house is to be insulated from the animation of the neighborhood. "I wanted the feeling that every time I entered my home I was walking into my sanctuary," says Egan. While the furnishings, artworks, colors, and tactile textures she chose foster that dynamic, it was also through the architecture of the house that a sense of peace was achieved.

To establish privacy while also bringing in an abundance of natural light, Mears designed the house so that an expansive butler's pantry faced one side of the house, essentially shielding the occupants from outright public view. The living room was positioned on the other side of the house and is protected from the street view and traffic noise by an enclosed courtyard.

Just as Egan loves geometry, so, too, ironically, does she embrace the imperfect. "Perfection is so boring," she says, referencing her penchant for new materials that appear weathered, as well as for incorporating antiques. The limestone fireplace mantels and surrounds are centuries-old French pieces, whose surfaces and bricking show their age. Frankly, though, there is little about her interior design scheme or the architecture that reveals anything less than the ideal. The most conspicuous architectural design elements are the house's large-scale, multi-pane windows, many of which incorporate doors. Among Egan's directives to Mears was a request for a house filled with light and one in which ceilings were high. "I've always been inspired by Belgian architecture and the design aesthetic there," she says, "and I

wanted this house, too, to have the feel that it had been here awhile. The windows we chose helped accomplish that."

Given the height of the ceilings, Mears ensured that each of the window/doorways included a fixed transom. "I encouraged Jill that we be modest with the height of our doors in these windows," says Mears. "A fixed transom brings the scale of the room down and makes it feel warmer. When you open a glass door and there's a transom above, it feels like there is more of a threshold." To further emphasize the transition between the interior and the outdoors that occurs upon passing through these glass doors, Mears splayed the walls allowing for yet more light to enter the room.

In Egan's design practice, she is exposed every day to patterns and colors, textures and accessories for her clients. "The minimalist in me chose a neutral palette for my own rooms, since I wanted to come home to a place that was calm and not overwhelmed by colors."

While most of the walls, ceilings, and floors are white or gray, the ceiling in her kitchen is a somewhat startling departure from that palette. There, white oak beams are set in a neat geometrical pattern. "As for those beams, I have to give Jill 1000% of the credit for them," says Mears. As he recounts it, while on the hunt for the right timber, Mears found red oak, but no kiln-dried white oak, the grade and hues Egan preferred. Eventually, he and Egan chose new white oak beams that were so "wet you could have squeezed water out of them with your thumb," says Mears. But they proved to be exactly the right color, and after six months they dried sufficiently. "I knew that, as they dried, the beams would expand and contract, but I wanted the characteristics that would result so that they looked like they had been there for long time," adds Egan.

The master bedroom is yet another space in which Egan chose to employ a different palette. She admits that blush is one of her favorite colors. "I feel pretty in that color and everyone should feel pretty in their bedroom," she says. "Fortunately, my husband is color blind! I'm not even sure he knows what the color looks like. What I know is that we both find the room calming, as we do all the rooms at home." ■

"It's in my nature to keep changing the elements in a room," says interior designer Jill Egan. "I do feel that a room is never really complete."

"They say a room is finished when you can't take anything away."

—Jill Egan

