



# modern english

AN OUTDATED CIRCA-1935 COLORADO TUDOR WITH GREAT BONES GETS A MUCH-NEEDED FACELIFT, TAKING IT FROM FUSTY TO FUN.

THE DENVER HOUSE WAS LIKE A GRANDE DAME FROM THE LONDON STAGE: THOUGH IT HAD GREAT PRESENCE AND CLASSIC BONES, IT WAS A BIT TOO, WELL, SEDATE AND SNOOTY FOR THE FAMILY THAT HAD JUST BOUGHT IT.

Enter Denver's Duet Design Group, whose goal was to honor the Tudor home's original

architectural integrity (including beautiful peaked arches and spectacular windows) but also bring it into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. "I didn't want to mess with what makes an English Tudor classic," says Devon Tobin, who founded the interior design firm in 2011 with Miranda Cullen. "On the other hand, when we first walked into the house, it felt stuffy. I knew we could tone it down so it didn't feel so ostentatious."

The house also felt a bit disjointed: When it was built in

words by ALISON GWINN • photography by DAVID LAUER



the 1930s, it was about 1,000 square feet, but several remodels later, it had ballooned to 4,500, with five bedrooms and five and a half baths. “When you walked in, you could actually clearly see where one remodel stopped and another one started,” says Tobin. “It didn’t flow. You could see it in the different kinds of flooring and the different textures to the walls. So that was my first challenge—undoing and unifying multiple remodels.”

Another big challenge was appealing to the divergent tastes of the couple who had bought the home. “This house is really the epitome of a classic Tudor on the outside, and the wife wanted to keep the original Tudor feeling of the home,” says Tobin. “But the husband likes things very contemporary.” Duet Design’s solution was to keep the original architectural details throughout the

home (“I would have a really hard time if someone wanted to mess up what makes an English Tudor classic,” says Tobin.) but cleverly mix up the interior furnishings.

One way they achieved that was to retain all of the home’s surprisingly light-filled windows—and in fact play them up by forgoing heavy drapes (which would have been typical for a Tudor) in favor of simple window treatments like custom faux valances that “dressed” the windows without covering them up. And because the owners had an original pair of Lucite stools, Duet Design used those pieces as a launching point to add Lucite accents throughout the home. “Lucite got a bad rap for a lot of years,” says Tobin, “but it’s a really awesome way for a designer to use furniture in a lighter way. It doesn’t take up much volume and mass, but it’s still functional.”



ABOVE (top to bottom): The newly expanded kitchen has pale tumbled-travertine floors and light Capco Pentel Quartz countertops and backsplash that play off the dark wood cabinets and the dark-navy island (painted the same color as the bookcases in the sitting room for continuity); the dining room, visible from the kitchen but separate, allows for intimate and elegant entertaining.



ABOVE: The focal point of the family room is the new gas fireplace, with a limestone surround. The custom built-in bookshelves (including a space for a TV above the fireplace, hidden behind pocket doors) are adorned with playful but traditional sconces from Robert Abby. Because it is the hub of the home, Duet Design placed a sink-into-it oversized sectional sofa next to ultra-hip blue velvet chairs from Thayer Coggin and Lucite nesting tables with brass detailing in classic shapes by Gabby Home. Many of the accessories on the shelves are from the homeowners, who are avid travelers.

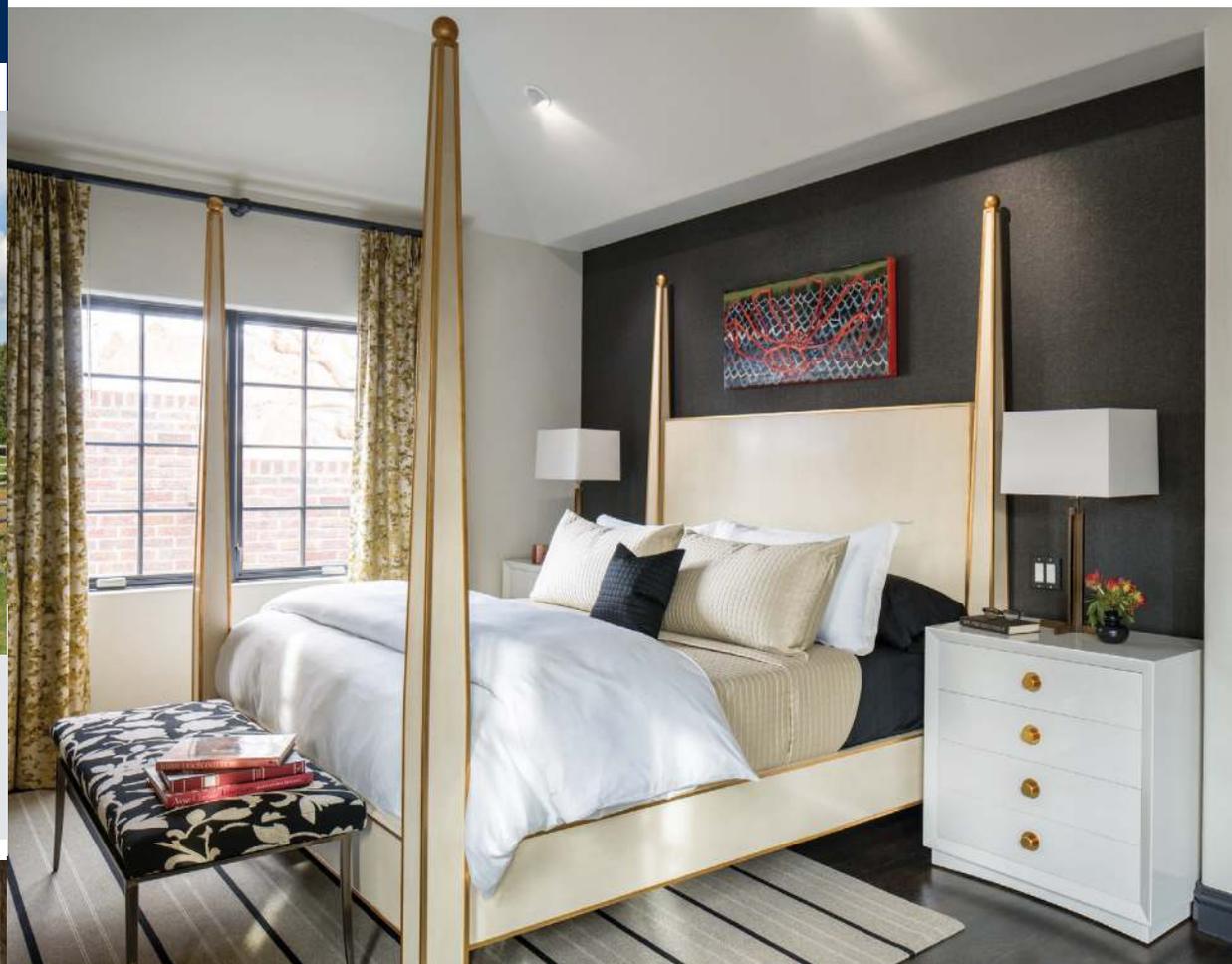
The designers mixed in other sleek pieces as well, like a mid-century-lined sofa and angular, contemporary brass chandeliers. “Those items were all an ode to the husband,” says Tobin. “It was like, ‘Here you go, buddy.’” But to honor the traditional, they also added pops of red and blue—in window seats, the kitchen banquette, even a deep crimson in the master bath cabinetry—because those are traditional “English” hues.

Duet Design also achieved a balance through the choice of

artwork for the walls. “My goal was to have art that you wouldn’t expect. Often people play art really safe and buy what they think the home ought to have. But art can tell a story and doesn’t have to relate to the architecture of the design at all. In fact, it can be totally opposite. With every piece in the house, you think, it’s kind of traditional, but also kind of modern. That’s what made it ultimately a successful design, because every item pays attention to the space but then honors the fact that the clients didn’t want an

overly traditional house.

“When I think about how to make sure I’ve done a home correctly, I ask myself: Is there a balance to it all,” says Tobin. “If I am going to place something here, where is it going to be balanced? So, for example, when I added the open black iron shelves to the kitchen, I realized that they gave me the ability to introduce the black iron table base in the dinette space. Nothing is a lone ranger.” The homeowners, who had worked with Tobin before, showed her looks and materials that they liked



but then pretty much gave her carte blanche. “She knows this better than we ever could,” says the wife, “and it all comes together and feels really good.”

The result is magical. “Now, the house has a playful feel to it,” says Tobin. “When you’re in it, you’re really comfortable. It’s one of those homes where you walk in and you’re like, ‘Oh, my god!’ but not ‘Oh, my god, I don’t want to touch anything!’ You feel like, I want to cozy up in front of this fireplace and have a really delicious martini.

You feel sexy in the space.”

The homeowners agree. “I like the fact that whoever comes through points out something new that I haven’t noticed before, whether it’s the lighting or the flooring or how the tile from one room works together with the tile in another room,” says the wife. “I love how comfortable and warm it is, and I love the light. It feels like every room has a different personality and you can see yourself in it, being happy reading or cooking or whatever you want.” **37**

## INSPIRED DESIGN

Denver-based Duet Design Group is a full-service design group that specializes in innovative design that both reflects and elevates the way people live in and experience their spaces.

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ABOVE (clockwise from top left): “The master bedroom needed to be very, very calming and very dark,” says Tobin, so Duet Design added a black grass-cloth wall covering by Phillip Jeffries behind the almost-regal four-poster bed; Tobin kept the home’s original crystal avian sconces in the powder room, adding a Kohler cabinet with quarter-sawn ash veneers, topped with Caesarstone in Calacatta Nuvo. It is all backed by a hand-painted zig-zag grass cloth from Schumacher; like a May-December romance, the contemporary chairs in the kitchen eating area, from Thayer Coggin, are paired with a very traditional-looking custom red tufted-leather banquette. The iron-based, glass-topped pedestal table by Noir Furniture, which is neither modern nor traditional, unites it all.