

A REASON FOR EVERYTHING

A modern young family with old Nashville roots
makes a 1930's traditional home new again

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Some homes merely welcome their visitors while others seem to invite guests to come right on into their owners' lives from the moment they cross the threshold. The Nashville home of general contractor Derek Van Mol, and his wife, Marcie Allen, president of music experiential agency MAC Presents, is of the latter variety. They recently invited us in to experience what is truly their inner sanctum.

To understand this duo's home, it's important to understand the captivating couple. This pair of native Nashvillians came of age here just like several generations of Van Mols and Allens did before them. Marcie's grandfather, noted WLAC Radio personality Bill "Hoss" Allen, was spinning gospel records in Music City decades before Derek's dad became the founding partner of advertising and public relations powerhouse, Dye Van Mol & Lawrence. Derek and Marcie, who dated in the seventh grade while attending MBA and Ensworth, respectively, lost touch as college choices deposited them in Southern cities hundreds of miles apart (he went to the College of Charleston, she to Rhodes College in Memphis). Derek, whose beginnings were in the IT industry, was also operating a landscaping company during this same period. It was this endeavor that planted the seeds for his eventual home renovation company, a business which would ignite his passion. Marcie, meanwhile, had been in the throes of developing a successful music industry career. With their lives tracking along parallel paths, they had both also been married and divorced. When Derek found himself single, he decided to reconnect with Marcie. Even though she had relocated MAC Presents to NYC in 2010, he contacted her via Facebook. "I congratulated her and asked her to let me know when she was back in Nashville. She did." They went on a date to the Germantown Cafe and the rest is history.

The now-married-for-three-years couple happily shares as much time as possible with Derek's daughters, 11-year-old Mary Holine and 8-year-old Ryan.

The couple has a Manhattan home across the street from Madison Square Park where they reside part-time, having transitioned there following a four-year residency in Williamsburg (Brooklyn). Marcie splits her time between Nashville and New York while Derek enjoys monthly visits to Manhattan. But it was the purchase of their Lynnwood Blvd. abode two winters ago that served as the "first test kitchen" for Derek's business. Built in the 1930s, the Belle Meade brick had the requisite requirements of excellent bones (as they say), terrific location, and an all-important pool for family recreational enjoyment. It also had something that no other home they'd toured could boast--swinging saloon doors installed to give the previous owners' beloved pot-bellied pigs freedom to roam. While most of their friends discouraged serious consideration of this potential happily ever after home (which had been unoccupied for two years), they were undaunted and persisted in their pursuit of the property with an all-caution-to-the-winds approach. After all, they weren't in search of a showplace; they simply wanted a comfortable, kid-friendly home where they could casually entertain friends and host events. Uncertain as to how to describe the home's exterior style we checked in with a local architect who dubbed it a typical "Nashville mixture, sort of colonial with a Federal entrance and Cape Cod dormers." And, it was precisely that Nashville "feel" which attracted these newlyweds. "Marcie gave me six weeks to renovate the entire house," Derek remembered. "Of course, she stayed in New York working the entire time, but we had a Christmas tree in the living room and shared our first holiday as a family, just like she'd hoped."





While not exactly a “money pit,” Derek soon discovered additional reasons as to why people tried to gently steer them in a different direction. The house had to be virtually gutted on a highly ambitious timetable. Derek and several teams of sub-contractors rolled up their sleeves and got busy.

When the house finally began to take shape, longtime family friends Michael King of Corzine & Co. and Liza Caldwell Coleman of Hillwood Interiors stepped up to assist the couple in melding their extensive art collection, travel and music photographs and family antiques into a more modern interior, inspired by their life in New York. The end result makes for an elegant, livable environment while maintaining the character of the house.

The family, which relishes traveling together, selects an artwork to bring home from every journey. In fact, Derek says that his travels are the habit that most powerfully inform his ideas for design. Each year one of the girls eagerly picks the next family destination and the planning process, as well as the visit, becomes an educational experience. Whether it’s Paris, London, Santa Monica, Hawaii, or the Bahamas, the world beckons them. Marcie and Derek also enjoy sharing their intense appreciation of music, concerts and musicians, so the triumvirate of art, travel and music is a large part of the interior aesthetic they’ve created in their Middle Tennessee residence.

Derek conceived a traditional scheme for the interior floor plan with a living room, dining room, den, sunroom, four bedrooms and a kitchen with breakfast room, but opened up and widened the entrances so that the public rooms blend into a single, inviting space. This cozy atmosphere entices visitors to sit and sip in every room on the downstairs level. A neutral color palette of soft grays, pale blues and beige, provides a subtle backdrop for displaying their various collections and artworks. Each room of the house tells a story or two without regard for design conventions or constraints. Accessories bring refined pops of saturated color into every room with the bold, deep teal Mitchell Gold velvet sofa in the family room/den singing the loudest as it animates the earth tones with just the right note of sophisticated pizzazz.

The screened porch, accessible through French portals from the den, is used for casual get-togethers and large party overflow. In fact, the home’s circular flow was intentionally designed to accommodate a variety of gatherings. Derek installed removable Plexiglass windows over the screens so that the room is used year-round. It is eclectically decorated with such found treasures as an old, white-washed door repurposed as a coffee table with iron legs, Marcie’s grandmother’s rattan pieces and a pair of white-washed shutter doors accenting either side of the seats-six dining table. A 19th century Palladian church window, stripped down to its natural wood state and hung above the windows, is the room’s standout statement piece.





From the porch, guests can also access the living room. Though more formal with its matching Lillian August beige linen sofas, greige wall color and built-in white bookcases, it is still visually stimulating with the addition of original artwork and bright turquoise and orange patterned pillows. One of Marcie's favorite paintings, a contemporary piece in muted blues and greens depicts a boy in the simple act of leaning down toward a black dog with hand outstretched, is showcased above a chest across from the room's traditional fireplace. Much of their artwork has been acquired at the Harding Art Show, the annual fundraiser for the school where the girls are enrolled.

Dogs, both one-dimensional and four-footed, reign supreme in the Van Mol household, as Boots, the family mutt, would attest. She's clearly the fifth member of the family, and a major presence during our visit. It's that kind of house, especially welcoming to both kids and dogs alike. Other works of art in the living room include: an oversized black-and-white photograph of famed Ellis Island, covered with the signatures of all the guests who attended the couple's apres-wedding party there, and two paintings from the family's recent trip to Paris, one a French interpretation of New York and the other a Parisian subway, along with a contemporary piece that was a gift from Derek's parents. A

Parisian wooden idea box turned into a lamp balances one side of the mantel while the other holds a shadow box from Peru. A 19th century secretary, purchased at the Belle Meade Fall Fest, is the room's obligatory "brown antique" and serves as its visual anchor.

At first glance, the dining room appears to be cut from a wholly traditional cloth with its inherited family table, seating for 10 and a buffet. But, Derek and designer Mike King, pushed this room into the current century with the addition of a modern hanging lantern instead of a conventional chandelier. The breakfast room, adjacent to the dining room, seats eight at a long table surrounded by crisp tailored chairs. Where this room was originally just a walk-thru, Derek has given it more purpose by installing a butler's pantry with sonic ice machine and wine fridge, creating the perfect segue into the sparkling white kitchen with stainless steel accents.

The kitchen is totally modern with granite counter tops, tile floor, Brooklyn-inspired metal fixtures above the island, large workhorse faucets, a Thermador oven and a Sub-Zero refrigerator. Artworks from New York and New Zealand, a Hatch Show Print-style piece done on wood reflecting Nashville hot spots and a local piece from Kauai decorate the pure white walls.





The screened porch, possibly the coziest space in the house, opens to an outdoor casual dining space. Down the brick steps and through an entrance thick with voluminous white hydrangeas, lies the lap pool framed by Adirondack chairs, and bursts of red begonias and blue coneflowers. The pool was already in place when the house was purchased, but its Tennessee flagstone decking and surrounding panoramic grounds needed serious attention. Derek let his landscaping expertise fly when it came to reinvigorating the gigantic green space now defined by a wooden bridge crossing the property's creek, a hammock stretched between decades-old trees and a wrought iron fence enclosing the pool area. "We worked on the outdoor space in the spring after we settled in. This house is such fun because there's always something to do. It's the ultimate work-in-progress!" Derek said with a laugh.

The man-cave, is, undoubtedly, Derek's favorite room and it is centered by a reclaimed barn wood bar he built with friends. The depth of Marcie's influence and marketing genius in pairing major brands with appropriate musical artists can be felt in the photos showcased here---there's an underwater photo of Nirvana, signed photos from John Mayer, Radiohead, Pearl Jam, Foo Fighters Garage tour, and a black-and-white of Dave Matthews, along with autographed Green Day, Red Hot Chili Peppers and Alabama Shakes guitars. Comfy, leather sofas, an inviting fireplace and vintage metal ceiling tiles add to the laid-back ambiance.

Oh, and the Johnny Cash portrait of the Man-in-Black aiming a camera squarely at the viewer, gives the man-cave bathroom an unexpected one-two visual punch.





Upstairs, the main staircase leads to the second-floor master bedroom and bath, guest room and Ryan's "pretty in pink" bedroom. The walls of the home's three-story stairway are lined, salon-style, with cherished black-and-white family photos of the Van Mols' travels. The master bedroom holds a trove of treasures passed down from both sides of the couple's families including Derek's grandfather's old cuckoo clock made into a shadowbox, bayonets from WWII and a framed image of the ship *Mauretania* and a copy of the manifest list showing Louis Van Mol's name, an immigrant to America who embarked in Brussels and arrived at Ellis Island in 1907. There's also a photograph of the Williamsburg Bridge, a 1973 photo of the East Village, as well as a rockin' Led Zeppelin shot. It's obvious from the objects with which they surround themselves that this is a pair fully attuned to the past, present and future. Though the Van Mols may be highly reverential where their personal histories are concerned, they dwell completely in the present when it comes to such modern amenities as their master bath with its white Carrera marble vanity and glass-enclosed shower complemented by white subway tiles.

The nearby guest bedroom takes on a patriotic tone with an American flag painting incised with handwritten lyrics of "Amazing Grace" displayed over the bed. Both rooms have tufted fabric headboards with beds dressed in Restoration Hardware linens. The overall design effect in this home is one of casual ease, though when the spaces are deconstructed it's clear that meticulous care has been taken with even the most minute of aesthetic decisions.

Daughter Ryan's room, dominated by bookcases showcasing her collection of snow globes lovingly collected during family travels, has a "treehouse" bed which looks quite inviting for reading. She is a budding artist who likes watching movies with friends in her closet, which is known in the house as "Ryan's Theatre."

Derek, stylishly dressed in a John Varvatos shirt and cuffed jeans, dismisses any perceived "cool factor" as just a work uniform. In the restaurant world, he would be in the chef-owned niche market, not a mega-chain restaurant guy. He attends builder shows in Las Vegas and the Architectural Digest Show in NYC, seeking artisan-made products from smaller companies. He specifically sought out the handcrafted New Orleans-made Bevolo lanterns which provide the exterior illumination lighting up the Van Mols' nights.

The home's third floor is dedicated daughter territory with its two dollhouses, one of which is another heirloom from Marcie's aunt, which was "remodeled" by Derek. There's a chalkboard paint wall and alcoves for craft projects. Across the hall, Mary Holine's room sports an iron bed draped with white sheers and a menagerie of pillows.

When asked about their multiple-home lifestyle, Derek quickly replied, "We are not those kind of people. We live how we live because of our careers. Wherever we are, it's important that every aspect of that place feel like us." And that is Derek's goal in any project that he leads: he wants each family's home to weave a narrative from special memories and experiences. sl