



ABOVE AND BEYOND

Hunter and Meredith Ellis' Travis Heights house does more than just function as a family home

BY GENE MENZ • PHOTOGRAPHY BY NICOLE MLAKAR

Hunter and Meredith Ellis consider their home more than just a home. For the Ellises, the 1920s-era, Craftsman-style house that they rent in Travis Heights is part house, part office, part portfolio and part laboratory.

That's the by-product of Meredith's passion and profession: interior design. The Comfort native, who is the daughter of an interior designer, has been a professional designer for 18 years and has worked for some of the country's top talents in New York City and Los Angeles. In 2008 she started her own design business, Meredith Ellis Design, and last year she opened her own showroom, JAMES, in Clarksville.

So her home must go beyond just being a place where she, Hunter, their two children (6-year-old daughter Parish and 4-year-old son Bourne) and their English bulldog pup, Patsieko, live. The house must

also serve as a place where she can work, meet clients, showcase her design talent and practice her craft.

"When I work for somebody, I'm always incorporating their ideas, their possessions and their desires," she says. "Our home is a place where I get to experiment and try things but also surround myself with what I like."

Hunter, a former *KEYE* morning anchor who also competed in the fourth season of *Survivor*, is used to his wife's constant experimentation. "Anyone who is married to an interior designer will know that their house is a testing ground," he says. "She likes to move things, change things and try things, and they all work."

Indeed, the interior of the Ellises' three-bedroom, 2,700-square-foot home has the fingerprint of a professional interior designer. The house shows an eclectic mix of refurbished antiques (many passed down from her family) and pieces collected from

Hunter's worldwide travels that blend beautifully with the home's traditional features, namely the crown molding, wood floors and wide wood plank walls.

Meredith's personal style is evident the moment you're inside the front door. The entry (which was originally designed to be the living room) features four chairs that were her grandmother's (two have been reupholstered and repainted), a turn-of-the-century French lantern that Meredith found in Round Top and today serves as a *de facto* chandelier and an oil painting of a great blue heron that Hunter's sister, Stacey Ellis, was commissioned to do. "We like things that have a story to it," Hunter says. "It makes it more interesting."

The living room, where the family spends the most time, is adorned with several pieces Hunter collected while traveling, most notably a Maasai wedding necklace he received when he was in Kenya. Bourne's room, which has a global traveler theme,



features wood plank walls, while Parish's room has walls painted in Farrow & Ball's Nagas Blue, an unconventional choice for a girl's space. The kitchen remains one of the Ellises' favorite spots in the house, with its 10 1/2-foot-high ceilings, mint-colored cabinets and headboard backsplash.

The house, however, didn't always look like this. Late in 2010, while living in The Ashton, the Ellises were struggling to find a character-filled home that was within walking distance of South Congress and the hike-and-bike trail. That's when Hunter stumbled across a Craigslist ad for a Travis Heights home for rent, and they arranged to see it.

"The house had good bones, but nothing flowed from room to room," Hunter recalls.

The entry was painted lime green and peach while the living room was red-gold with an orange ceiling. "It was a million different colors," Meredith says, "but we loved it."

In January 2011, the Ellises moved in and, with the blessing of the homeowner,

"SHE LIKES TO MOVE THINGS, CHANGE THINGS AND TRY THINGS," HUNTER SAYS OF HIS WIFE, "AND THEY ALL WORK."

they painted walls and floors, replaced all window treatments and transformed the house into something special. "We've taken care of the house as if it were ours," Meredith says. Adds Hunter, "We tried to persuade the homeowners to sell the house over the years, but I don't think they're interested."

It's easy to see why. ■

PHOTOS BY PAUL

The Ellis family—(from left) Saurie, Parish, Meredith and Hunter—and their pup, Pancho, enjoy a tastefully appointed home that has the fingerprint of an interior designer.

TOP PAGE: COURTESY OF THE ELLIS FAMILY

The entry showcases chairs that once belonged to Meredith's grandmother, like the entry, the living room is painted in Benjamin Moore Revere Pewter; Parish's room features a four-poster bed that used to be in Meredith's room when she was young; the kitchen cabinets have been mint-colored since before the Ellises moved in; pieces from Hunter's travels adorn the living room.