



DESIGN WITHOUT BORDERS

Paul Lechleiter taps interior designer Grace Lawson of Bittners as a creative partner for a whole-house renovation in Cincinnati's Indian Hill neighborhood.

Written by Bridget Cottrell / Photos by Tony Bailey

It all started with a fridge on the fritz. The ailing appliance put the empty nest homeowners at a crossroads: replace or embark on the major renovation they had long pined for. Choosing the latter, they called on friend and neighbor Paul Lechleiter, who was also amid a second-act journey of his own. After spending more than two decades as the Chief Creative Officer at FRCH (now Nelson Worldwide), an international architecture and design firm, Lechleiter, a Louisville native, wasn't quite ready to quit flexing his creative muscle once he retired from the corporate world. "Commercial design isn't that personal, and I always wanted to be an interior designer; Bittners and Hubbuch & Co. were my idols growing up," he recalled.

Being in an enviable position to be picky about the projects he chooses to take on, Lechleiter was excited about the transformation of this Indian Hill home, in large part because of his collegial working relationship with the homeowners. "They really gave us free rein," he said.

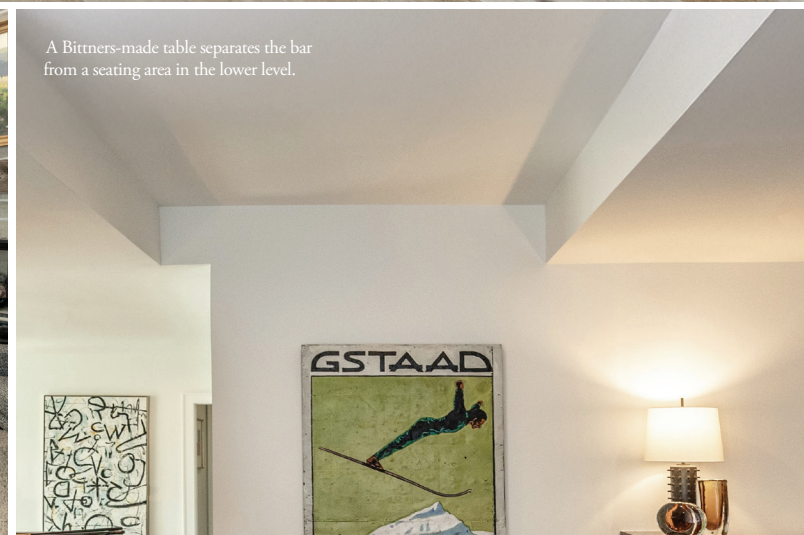
Serving as the project's architectural designer, Lechleiter spearheaded the physical changes, intending to round the corners of the preexisting contemporary elements of the spacious early

2000s-era home situated on a park-like lot. "It was all about adding a little personality in a familiar way," he said. Replacing the existing casement windows with true divided-light windows hints at the significant changes inside, affecting nearly every surface from floor to ceiling.

When the renovation dust had settled, Lechleiter had no doubt that Bittners would be his collaborator of choice for finishing the interiors. Still, he had one big caveat: he wanted everything finished and furnished within a tight six-month timeframe. "Douglas [Riddle, President & COO of Bittners] has a cut-through-it directness that I really love," said Lechleiter, adding that being able to pull available products directly from the Bittners' showroom inventory was "a game changer".

Following his conversation with Lechleiter, Riddle selected designer Grace Lawson for the project. Lawson, who earned a degree in Interior Design from the University of Kentucky, was a kindred spirit with Lechleiter, as she had also worked for an architectural firm early in her career while living in Boston. "My experience there helped me to seamlessly maneuver between historic and modern elements," she said.





While time constraints prevented Lawson from having the luxury of custom-ordering pieces, she said she never felt they had to make any compromises. "I like playing with texture, and the home's limited color palette allows for that," she said. Ample trim and molding, introduced in the entry and carried throughout the first floor, adds interest in the absence of a busy color palette and emphasizes the artwork.

In the living room, an intentionally edited and arranged assortment of books, art, and objects populate the built-ins added on either side of the fireplace, emphasizing the ceiling height. A pair of custom rugs, layered one atop the other, was sourced from Carpet Specialists. Accent pillows on the sofa and sculpted wood armchairs provide a pop of color and pattern.

Open to both the living and hearth rooms, the renovated kitchen and casual dining area offer a mix of modern and rustic design elements. Adding ceiling beams and resurfacing the fireplace surround with stone in the hearth room adds to its cozy, casual appeal, reinforced by a subtly textured rug, a faux bois floor lamp, and varied textures in the upholstery and pillows. What had been a niche to accommodate an early-2000s tube television was converted into a built-in display for books and art.

In the dining room, casement windows were replaced with French doors. The homeowners' existing dining room table and chinoiserie hutch are among the few pre-renovation furniture pieces to remain. Suspended above the table is a pair of Arteriors Rittenhouse 6-Light chandeliers.

A Bittners-made table separates the bar from a seating area in the lower level.



An art-filled corridor leads to the primary suite. The bedroom's wall color, a subtle lilac hue, creates a restful atmosphere, as do supporting soft case goods, including a tufted headboard and a pair of Baker Barbara Barry Bubble chairs upholstered in a textured boucle fabric. The renovated primary bath kept the same footprint, trading stepped vanities for those with more elegant lines and swapping an inset jetted tub for a free-standing one.

The lower level was renovated to the wife's specifications. A French-bistro-inspired area near the bar is a preferred spot to host friends for cocktails. A pair of small round marble-topped tables is surrounded by classic rattan bistro chairs on one side and a

cushioned banquette along the white-wainscoted wall. The art, depicting a white egret in flight, was a group pick among friends. A Bittners-made table with an X-shaped trestle base separates the bar from a seating area. A black steel-framed window divider distinguishes the pool table area while sharing an abundance of natural light with the entire entertaining area.

Looking at the "before" photos, it's hard to believe that this elegant abode, which effortlessly embraces the rarified air where casualness and elegance harmoniously co-exist, is the same house. The unanimity also reflects the project's collaborative nature. "It was a great, fun group effort," said the wife. **sl**

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