

# CONTEMPORARY CHARM

WRITTEN BY *Phoebe Wahl*  
PHOTOGRAPHED BY *Mali Azima*

RESIDENTIAL DESIGNER RODOLFO CASTRO AND INTERIOR DESIGNER JULIE WITZEL PAIR UP TO CRAFT A MODERN INTERPRETATION OF A FARMHOUSE FOR A YOUNG FAMILY—PROVING THAT CONTEMPORARY IS ANYTHING BUT COLD.

The dining room of this contemporary Decatur home is awash in bright light thanks to a thoughtful renovation by design team Rodolfo Castro, Julie Witzel and Lefko Design + Build. Custom walnut slab dining table by Taylor Dinsker Design, Dining chairs by Mitchell Gold + Bob Williams. Chandelier by Design. Painting over console from Bill Lowe Gallery.



The sitting room is a textural mix of warm and cool tones, from a walnut console and stone side table (both by GREY) to eye-popping pieces of art, including a piece from Bill Lowe Gallery (above the console) and one from the homeowner's collection, Chandelier by Hubbard Forge. Sofa and chair by American Leather at Verde Home, egg-shaped Castro painted the brick exterior Benjamin Moore China White, as it is "clean and warm without being creamy ... modern without being cold," he says.



WHEN OLD COLLEGE FRIENDS OF RODOLFO CASTRO, owner of Castro Design Studio, first approached the residential designer to renovate their circa-1960 Decatur ranch, he set to work conceiving a home that was both modern and conducive to living with young children. "We wanted the house to feel familiar but also new," Castro explains. "It was important that we create a light and airy space that could be both elegant and family-friendly."

Building upon the foundation of the original single-story house, Castro worked with the family to design a home that would also be respectful of the scale and fabric of the neighborhood. He presented his clients with a concept sketch—a modern interpretation of a farmhouse. The result is a two-story brick exterior (painted in Benjamin Moore China White), with concrete patios and a metal roof punctuated by dark, aluminum-clad windows.

The basic form, says Castro, is fairly traditional, but he imbued it with modern flair by stripping the facade of any ornament and adding a covered front porch. "We wanted the house to be honest," he offers. "I thought that if the right materials were used, we would not need any embellishments." Likewise, the interiors, entrusted to designer Julie Witzel, display a trace of crown molding or window casings.

Since light was of great importance to their clients, the two talents opted for a light stain on the floor and white walls. For the wide-planked white oak floors, Witzel brought on a floor expert from Great American Floor, whom Castro dubs "part scientist, and part saint." Following the application of a custom-mixed stain, the floors were finished with an

ultra-matte polyurethane. "It was important to go with matte finish, because with all the natural light that comes into this home, we did not want to see a distracting glare," Witzel says.

Another design decision that contributed to its light and clean interior: painting the walls Benjamin Moore's Simply White in satin so the interiors would feel "gallery-esque" and bright. "We knew art was going to be a major factor and our main source of color, so we really wanted the pieces to stand out," Witzel declares.

That said, "There are small children in this home, so durability was key," she notes. Working with a palate of warm grays and whites, she espoused natural materials over synthetics to inject warmth to the modern interior. Solid woods and hard-wearing fabrics were chosen for easy cleaning. Clean-lined antique pieces were selected to incorporate character into a mix that includes some of the homeowner's personal treasures as well works of art with an emphasis on color and texture for added dimension.

To counteract the white walls (and ample natural light), Witzel employed custom-designed sheer window treatments from J. Lass and Company for the public rooms and blackout linings for the sleeping quarters. In the bathrooms and laundry room, she used large-format ceramic tiles in a grid format with minimal grout spacing for a clean-lined feel. Most of the furnishings she sourced locally, with the exception of items such as the unique "Clara" walnut dining table. Cut from a single slab of wood with a distinctive crack from where an 80-year-old tree grew around a coil, it's a metaphor for an updated house that feels as original as its owners. See Resources, Back of Book.



"THE CHALLENGE, AS IS OFTEN THE CASE WITH MODERN HOUSES, WAS TO MAKE IT FEEL WARM, INVITING AND LIVABLE FOR A FAMILY WITH YOUNG CHILDREN."  
— RODOLFO CASTRO

The kitchen was designed by Mary Kathryn Timoney of Design Galleria Kitchen and Bath Studio. Breakfast table by Skylor Morgan Furniture + Design. Art from Anne Irwin Fine Art. *above*: The living room opens to the dining room and expansive backyard. Art from Bill Lowe Gallery. Custom sofas by TecnoSedia.





above: In the master bedroom, Witzel custom-designed bed linens using fabric from Roma and Nobilis. Art from Bill Lowe Gallery, right. The master bathroom is state-of-the-art—and fuss-free. Art from Bill Lowe Gallery. Stump stool by Chip and Company at Martin Nash, opposite. A guest bedroom feels calm and collected—as if you could sink right in. Art from Bill Lowe Gallery. Lighting by Phillips Luminaire; custom shade by Julie Witzel Interior Design. Custom window treatments fabricated by J. Laiss and Company.

