

# THE TIMELESS APPEAL OF TEXTURE

Robin Rains deftly weaves layers upon layers

*Written by Leigh Hendry and Gloria Houghland*

*Photography by Allen Clark*



In today's interior design world, there seem to be two current schools of thought with no gray area in between: Clients are opting for either an abundant use of saturated color or a subtle, soothing palette of neutrals. Both are highly effective and can be used to craft substantial, dramatic, wow effects. How that is done exactly, is best left to professionals as it's not quite as effortless as it may appear.

The bold use of color can produce undesirably jarring results while a home enslaved to nothing but neutrals is often downright underwhelming. From the minute we arrived to meet prominent Middle Tennessee interior designer Robin Rains, founder of Robin Rains Interior Design and Shelby Ray, her design associate of 15 years, at the renovated Belle Meade home of clients Davonna and Randy Wachtler, we observed how Rains had resolved that particular design dilemma.

Stepping across the threshold of the Wachtlers' "friends and family entrance," we immediately noted Rains' striking use of black-and-white, supported by an assemblage of neutrals. "In order to make

neutrals pop in a design concept," Rains explained, "it's necessary to incorporate texture upon texture." And, that is precisely what this design duo did to transform this traditional Belle Meade estate with 15 rooms into a modern interpretation of current interior trends.

The Wachtlers and their two teenage sons, Haden and Harrison, relish the privacy of the property as well as its outstanding views. As the president and CEO of Warner/Chappell Production Music, one of the world's largest music production companies, Randy Wachtler wanted his home to provide a daily respite from the rigors of an all-in career.

The couple's former dwelling in the exclusive Williamson County enclave of Beech Hill, which sprawled over 10,000 square feet on a 10-acre setting, offered the degree of privacy which the couple required. Rains had awakened that property with her distinctive design flair, so when the Wachtlers discovered and purchased an 11-acre estate in Belle Meade, they knew before they'd finished signing the closing papers, that Rains' expertise would be a crucial element in their grand "moving-closer-to-town" plan.









They were also surprised that the Chickering Lane location wouldn't necessitate any relinquishing of their seclusion. Even more fortuitous was the fact that a year later entertainer Justin Timberlake's mother and stepfather were interested in acquiring the pair's Beech Hill residence. The stars quickly aligned, and voila!, the Wachtlers engaged both Rains and architect Ron Farris of Farris Concepts in Architecture, and the renovation was rapidly underway.

More than a year later, guests frequently pass through the easily accessible, arched "friends" entrance with its original French screen doors. An existing vintage black-and-white mosaic marble floor provided the bones for Rains' design plan. She and Ray began by covering the shiplap walls and beamed ceiling (created from the original floor joists) in Sherwin Williams' "Pure White" paint. They incorporated the owners' wooden farm table from their previous home and had a custom, faux ostrich banquette with nail head trim, designed for lounging as well as dining, made to go with it. The host and hostess chairs are slipcovered in an Art Deco-influenced, geometric printed linen. Wherever possible, they used washable fabrics for ease of maintenance. The indoor/outdoor powder-coated steel chairs are from Made Goods while the owners purchased the bentwood chair at Nashville's annual Antique and Garden Show. Rains convinced the Wachtlers to keep a unique propeller fan that came with the house as she felt it brought added architectural dimension to the room and its wood happily matched the farm table. The propeller also leads the viewer's eye toward an Ed Nash painting hanging above the banquette, which is flanked by a pair of vintage wrought iron sconces. On the table, Rains has placed two, white

Deco concrete planters (scouted on a buying trip to France) filled with clump moss. The sand linen slipcovered iron bar stools from Arteriors are small, unobtrusive and lightweight enough so that they can be easily moved around the kitchen's three islands. With one of the islands on wheels, chances are the stools could turn up anywhere.

The kitchen has a European undertone feel with its two sets of arched French doors and patterned marble floor. There are also two Sub-Zero refrigerators and a Wolf stove anchoring the washed brick wall at the back of the space. Rains had the kitchen cabinetry painted with Sherwin Williams "Grizzle Gray" and added cast iron industrial lighting pendants over the islands, which are topped with black soapstone or white marble. The designer, who says she lives for the "hunt" of found objects, strategically placed a large marble-and-brass scale from France, a stone mortar and pestle, several muted Oriental rugs and an oversized round breadboard brought from Belgium, in the kitchen. There are black-and-white etchings on the wall and a photograph of the homeowners' boxer, Lucy, who is, coincidentally, also black-and-white, with some neutral brown mixed in, just like the rest of the home.

From the kitchen, one set of French doors leads into the dining room with its caramel-colored toile wallpaper and chairs done in a luxurious cut velvet damask the shade of muted toffee. The effect of the multitude of warm brown neutrals is timeless elegance. The other set of doors opens into the formal entrance hall with a winding staircase which sports a fashion-forward antelope print carpet on its treads. A stately English bench, which also made the journey from the Hidden Valley house, welcomes guests there when





they enter. “We married the pieces they already owned with some new acquisitions,” Rains pointed out. The architectural details of the house itself, such as the Deco-inspired dental moulding around the doors leading to both the living and dining rooms were retained and painted white, while the wood floors received a transparent black stain treatment. Artist Ted Saul’s pale distressing of the doors adds the final classic but modern touch.

The living room, off the foyer, leads to the sunroom and is an ideal spot for the Wachtlers to entertain. “They have a clear sense of their style,” Rains said, “and wanted to keep the home neutral. For example, we covered the Lee Industries sofa in a gray Belgian linen. You know, gray is the new beige,” Rains said with a laugh. “We added the Angora pillows, the Chivasso Fabrics gray-and-white damask pillows and the old English architectural etchings in similar, but not ‘matchy-matchy,’ gilded frames on the wall above for the textural element.” The coffee table, with its antique mirrored top and iron base, was custom-made in three separate sections so that any part can be moved to configure multiple seating areas in the room. Rains painted the fireplace black and replaced the existing gas logs with oh-so-modern black architectural fireballs with white crystal ash. Adorning the mantel are several pieces of Mercury glass repurposed from the inside liners of old thermoses which the designer sourced in Belgium. Cozily grouped around the fireplace is a custom daybed, tufted and covered in an ivory glazed linen surrounded by mismatched chairs of different shapes and sizes from a Julian Chichester tuxedo parlor chair to a pair of Michael Taylor iron chairs to a wool flannel Hickory Chair ottoman to a

crushed velvet Romo fabric on a Noir chair with an iron frame. Layers and layers of glorious texture create a harmonious rhythm through the single tone of color. “When you layer a lot, you have to have understated elements,” explained Rains. “The lighting in the room helps achieve that.” A large black grand piano and oil painting dramatically ground the room while the lighting lends an airiness. The cylindrical translucent silk shades of the floor lamps seem to melt right into the pure white walls. Lighting, an essential textural element, according to Rains, totally sets the mood. The sun shining through the ivory silk drapes during the daytime to the flickering flames of the fireplace at night, create an impeccable ambience, she said.

Of note, is the designer’s application of texture in the wife’s study, wet bar and elevator off the living room. The pale taupe contemporary leather chair is centered on one side of the desk facing two vintage chrome sling chairs crafted from diamond weave white yarn. The wall behind the Vintage Millwork wet bar, which is functionally located between the study and living room, was painted black and then wallpapered with an openwork, gold leaf-textured paper by Weitzner, Ltd. It allows the ebony color to peek through, reminiscent of the kind of “torn hole-y jeans” which are all the rage in contemporary fashion today. A beaded chandelier in black, cream and brown hangs overhead. The home’s original elevator is also located in this space. Rains and Ray said they had fun imprinting it with a vibe of old Hollywood sex appeal using a white tufted wall covering, a swirly black-and-white carpet, a mid-century sconce and a retro black wall telephone.









Up the staircase, past the Wachtlers' teenage sons' rooms, are the master bedroom and the newly renovated master bath. Rains, who prefers local sourcing, went to Kenny and Company in the Gulch for all the plumbing, Vintage Millworks for the cabinetry and Mission Stone for the marble in the Ron Farris-designed, spa-like sanctuary. "We fell in love with the glass-and-marble mosaic tile in the showroom and used it for the shower floor, which became the focal point of the room and the primary inspiration for the entire process. Calcutta Gold Marble European-sized rectangular tiles were used on the floor of the bath with smaller tiles of the same material used around the shower walls. The over sized glass enclosure with two doors appears to just float in the center of the room. The soaking tub was centered in front of the picture window to take full advantage of view of the woods and pool area, where a new pool house is being constructed. For privacy, the designer installed Hartman and Forbes programmable, motorized woven silk-and-wooden shades. Their texture plays nicely off the ever-changing light as it dances from surface to surface while showcasing the spectacular beauty of the vintage Murano glass chandelier. "This room was about keeping it all

white," explained Rains, with the textural interest provided by all of the other sparkling elements. An Alpaca "pouf" from Emporium Home waits patiently for the homeowner by the tub along with a brushed gold, hammered metal chair by Made Goods nearby. This light, white and modern space offers a clean, fresh counterpoint to the traditional architecture found throughout.

The Wachtlers wanted an addition to the home that was both liveable for a family of four and entertainment friendly. They brainstormed with Rains, Ray and Farris in order to devise a swoon-worthy media suite with its own staircased-entrance over a much-needed garage. With its white washed Provenza wood flooring, black marble and dazzling silver-and-white metallic herringbone wallpaper, this inviting area projects an upscale, fun sense of style. The classic linear metal staircase railing was sourced from Elon's Metal Works while rope lighting was used to illuminate an under-the-staircase reading nook where two armless host chairs, covered in glazed linen, beckon. A small, brushed gold log table is juxtaposed here below an antique console holding the room's focal point: a leaning Michael Madzo painting from Leiper's Creek Gallery.













Up the winding staircase, under a stunning spiral crystal chandelier, past a white resin tusk scone, a large window with black mullions and white casing and an abstract painting by Kelly O’Neal, guests arrive at the entertaining heartbeat of the Wachtlers’ home. The Art Deco pendant lighting above the bar was purchased first and then the custom media bar, topped with black and white striated marble, was built as a fitting complement. Its black leather barrel-back bar stools add a casual, L.A.-nightclub vibe. There’s also a wine room here, a white marble guest bath with a fanciful black wallpaper stamped with silver lizards by Osborne and Little, a pool table, conversational casual lounge and a theatre room. At the top of the steps, visitors can view the Wachtlers’ album cover collage, all of which hold personal meaning for the couple. Randy, a world class music industry veteran, has spent more than 30 years in the business. His company has composed works for countless well-known TV shows, as well as movies, so this grouping represents a visual stroll through his life’s work.

The room’s wonderfully unique ceiling came from Southern Accents Architectural Antiques in Cullman, Alabama. It is a charred cedar resembling an old Japanese custom called shou-fugi-ban. “We really wanted black wood and happened to stumble upon this company. There was so much more dimension to this wood. The charring adds an interesting depth

and you can still see the graining, so it has reinvented itself in a different way,” Rains said.

The game table is surrounded by durable, yet comfortable chairs fashioned from seat belts by the Phillips Collection. In the lounge area, an elongated, crushed gold, washed linen velvet sofa, accented with Oushak overdyed pillows and Restoration Hardware embroidered geometrics, literally calls out to those in need of relaxation and a cocktail. A Lucite chair from Mitchell+Gold is covered in a coordinating geometric print while a faux leather ottoman and a pair of Lee Industries gray flannel swivel chairs complete the setting. One of Wachtler’s drums, retrofitted as a side table, serves as a visual exclamation point.

With the Wachtlers mission accomplished, Rains and Ray, dashed off to Paris to hit the incredible Clignancourt flea market and all other markets in between. Though they’ll arrive home long before their shipping container lands on this side of the ocean, rest assured that when it does, it will be packed to the brim with one-of-kind treasures, oozing with texture and patina. Some of the pieces will have been selected specifically for clients and some to be housed momentarily in Leiper’s Creek Gallery, while awaiting shoppers with a discerning eye to happen by and take them home. “We just like to buy things we love! Eventually we find the perfect spot for everything,” they said without the slightest note of concern in their voices. And obviously the Wachtler’s agree. **sl**