

Southern Accents

The magazine of fine Southern interiors and gardens

March - April 1994 \$5.00







Retreat *from the* Fast Track

While juggling renovations, travel, and design, Suzanne B. Allen has created a cozy Atlanta refuge

BY CATHERINE HAMRICK
PHOTOGRAPHS BY JONATHAN HILLYER

LEFT: Suzanne Allen installed bookcases and recessed lighting in the living room. Yellow walls set off the English mantel and portrait. Floral design by S. B. Allen & Company Design
ABOVE: Japanese woodblock prints, Chinese provincial plates, and botanical prints adorn the wall





ABOVE: Red walls in the study provide a stunning backdrop for 18th-century engravings. Two Belgian cloisonné lamps, one of them sitting on an Allen-designed table (faux painted with a Greek key motif), are early 19th century. The sofa was designed by S. B. Allen & Company Design. OPPOSITE: An 18th-century engraving hangs above a nook that displays papier-mâché, 19th-century quill boxes, and pen-work pieces.

says. Any given space should have architectural integrity. Depending on the situation, extensive redesign, renovating, or gutting may be appropriate. With every project, she takes to heart the advice of the late Eleanor Brown, her mentor at the McMillen design firm in New York in the late seventies. "Always respect the past. Embrace the present. Enthusiastically look to the future."

Before Suzanne moved into her apartment, no one had updated it since the 1960s. So after much demolition, she installed moldings and bookcases and put recessed

lighting in the living room for drama.

Hidden details count as much as lovely architecture, so Suzanne had devoted years to understanding the practical side of her business. Her profession isn't all glamour; she muses. A stint at the Parsons School of Design in the late seventies brought her face-to-face with plumbing, electrical plans, construction, and architecture. She then worked in New York, honing her skills in residential and commercial design and reconstruction before moving her business, S. B. Allen & Company Design, to Atlanta in 1983.

Suzanne's talent for displaying found objects enhances the architectural elements of her interiors. Her own apartment is a case in point. She decorated over time, adding French, English, Italian, and Oriental pieces as if deliberately filling in a picture-perfect puzzle. "The sofa was the only item made for this apartment," she says. "Everything else fell into place as I accumulated objects overseas."

Old textiles also fascinate her. A paisley shawl rests on her down-filled, red and cream sofa, and a down pillow of old French needlepoint punctuates a quaint English



ABOVE: A 19th-century Swedish light fixture crowns the bed. Wallpaper by Clarence House.
 BELOW: In a corner of the bedroom is a restored linen press decorated with ferns from her brother's Georgia farm. A 19th-century tole urn was beautifully transformed into a lamp.



bobbin chair. Elegant late eighteenth-century tapestry embellishes a pair of Portuguese chairs. Inspired by such treasures, Suzanne is now developing fabric designs of her own, just as she designed a collection of faux-painted wood-and-metal tables, coronas, pelmet boards, and other furniture last year.

Even with her professional demands, Suzanne vigorously continues her education. Books on architecture, design, art history, decorative arts, textiles, and painting line her bookshelves and pile up on tables at home and the office.

She demands perfection when selecting color. "The direction and amount of light determine color. In a north-facing room, light is unchanging. Blues and greens pale there. It's far better to use warm colors in limited or north-facing light," she says. For this reason, Suzanne chose yellow for her living and dining rooms.

But painting requires more than an eye for color. Suzanne delves into chemical analysis and the techniques and agents used to create colors in the South of France and Italy. Old French and Italian buildings still stand as lessons in color, she says. While canvassing markets in Europe and England, she also checks suppliers for old pigments, tools, and other resources.

Wherever Suzanne B. Allen travels, she exudes high energy and lively humor. In the spirit of their digging forays years ago, her mother sometimes joins in the quest for prizes desired by clients. Often the hunt becomes more of a chase. If Suzanne's mother falls behind (she may lag to chat with her favorite dealers), she will catch up and good-naturedly bop her daughter with her pocketbook as if to say, "Slow down." Suzanne may turn around with a smile, but in the next moment she is off, eager for the next discovery. When she finally eases her pace, she does so at home—in comfort and style. ◇