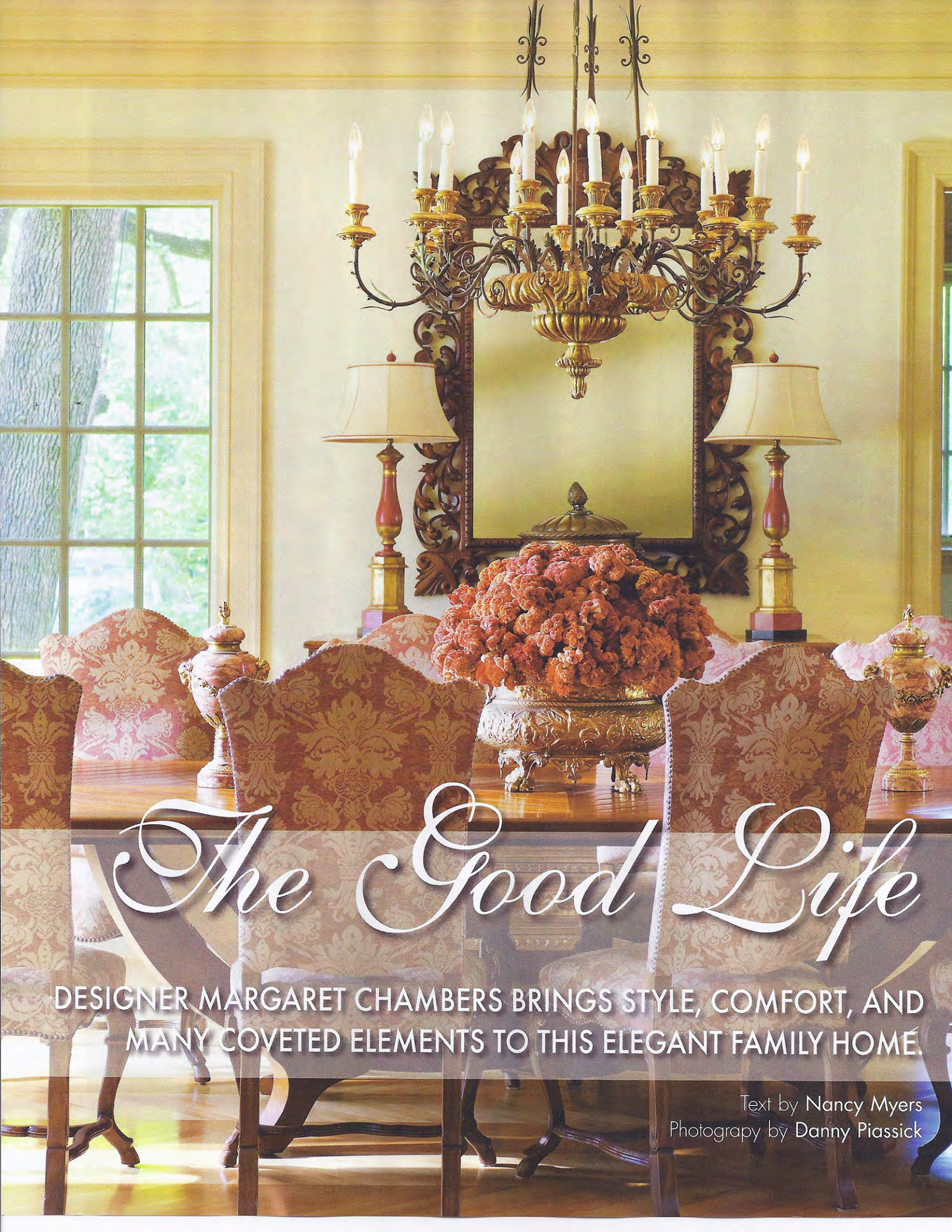

The Good Life

DESIGNER MARGARET CHAMBERS BRINGS STYLE, COMFORT, AND MANY COVETED ELEMENTS TO THIS ELEGANT FAMILY HOME.

Text by Nancy Myers
Photograpy by Danny Piassick

The time was finally right for these Dallas homeowners to build the classic Mediterranean-style dwelling of their dreams. Kirk and Mary Oliver long envisioned such a home, but had never built a house, nor had worked with a decorator or interior designer. Enter Margaret Chambers, of Chambers Interiors & Associates, Inc., who blended with the building team and immediately hit it off with the Oliver's.

"One thing I can say about Mary is that we just clicked," says Chambers. She followed her tried-and-true formula – to discover, define, and execute the vision. Often that involves incorporating new pieces with the old, but in this case, there were no existing pieces. "The Oliver family moved a lot so they had to be pretty frugal with their holdings," says Chambers. "We started from scratch. I was hired before the house was built, and therefore I have seen the project through from its initial stages: paint color, light fixtures, tile selection, etc. Basically, the bare bones until they moved in; then, I began work on the furnishings and accessories, room-by-room."

opposite The dining room presents a La Scala, 16-arm chandelier with distressed bronze gold finish and aged rust iron accents; Ebanista Treviso arm and side chairs with antique nail head trim and Kravet Couture fabric; a custom-made solid walnut dining table with one large base, four supporters and simple carved feet; a French walnut mirror; a pair of French marble Cassolette urns, circa 1880; and a 19th-century French Legion (brass) Jardiniere with bronze handles and tin liner.

"I had a vision of what I wanted," says Mary. She and Kirk had previously lived in New York and though, at first, weren't sure how long they'd live in Texas, they had always wanted a Mediterranean home. "Then we thought, 'we're going to build one and really enjoy it,'" she says. The couple's idea of building their dream home was first hatched a few years ago, but Mary says plans soon became too large in scope. "It started to be more like a palace than a home," she says. "It got out of control, and we thought we might go back to New York. Then 9/11 happened and everything came to a screeching halt (Kirk worked on Wall Street), so we decided to stay in Texas and got back to work on the home."

Their now finished home meets their desired architectural style on every front – from a terra cotta tile roof and stucco walls, to stone-framed windows. Richard Drummond Davis is the architect, and Barry Buford (of Buford Builders Inc.) handled the building process. "We really liked Barry," Mary says. "Several of our friends spoke highly of him." He, in turn, introduced Oliver to Chambers.

Mary speaks highly of Chambers: "I love her work! During the building process, I was commuting from New York to Dallas, and had a new baby as well as two other children, so time was of the essence. Margaret was amazing. I would tell her what I wanted or give her an idea and she would find it. I don't think there was a time we had to go back and revisit anything twice. We really communicated; she listened to what I wanted and presented phenomenal ideas."

Some elements of their collaboration were all too serendipitous, such as the discovery of a large chest that is now under the staircase. "It's a 200-year-old chest with nail-head trim, and it turned out it had Kirk's (and son's) initials," the designer says. "Mary loved it!"

above The entryway includes the black lab, Scout (seen here lounging); an aged-bronze chandelier; custom pedestals of solid alder wood; custom art by Lynn Rushton; a pair of gilt altar elements on a chest with antique mirror; and a pair of Baroque-style arch angels on the other chest.

previous page In the living room there is an 18th-century French tapestry with gilt frame; a tufted chair with a pleated and buttoned waterfall skirt; a gilded French mirror; a 19th-century Italian inlaid table; a pair of large Italian sconces with an antique mirror; an oak armchair from late 18th-century France; an Ebanista Lombardo chair and cocktail table; a custom sofa with antique nail-head trim; a pair of dolphin andirons; majolica urns on the mantel; a pair of 19th-century C. Spelter figures for the coffee table and jade carvings of birds for the side oval table; a Louis XIV-style Boulle box for the sofa table, France, 1860; a late 19th-century Chinoiserie box for the coffee table; an antique bronze urn on marble base on the round table; and two bronze tools on the monumental guard, attributed to Mellon Estate in Pittsburgh.

The sideboard in the entryway is accented with a custom framed mirror and antique glass; a Black Forest-style jewelry boxed in carved oak; a pair of Italian Renaissance armchairs, circa 1860; and an 18th-century Italian walnut trestle table.

The house is packed with many other equally rare finds. Two Italian paintings by a local artist who had gone to Italy and done a lot of thumbnail sketches hang in the entryway. "We picked out the thumbnails," Chambers says. "It was really hard to find a pair of paintings that were different, but in the same palette." The paintings are paired with two, hand-painted Italian chests.

All items are treasured for their historic significance, sentimental value, or pure aesthetic appeal. In the living room, an oak armchair from late 19th-century France displays a crest of stylized acanthus leaves as well as scrolling foliage that is carved down the inverted vase-shaped splat. Other objects, such as dolphin andirons for the fireplace, majolica urns on the mantel, a 19th-century Italian inlaid table, and a pair of large Italian sconces also add to the room's elegant, yet comfortable, appeal.

"Barry was amazing, too, and Margaret worked well with Barry," Mary said. "They were both invested and cared about their work. They are passionate about what they do, and talented. Margaret, Barry, and the architect all communicated successfully." Mary says the overall process went so well she would even do it again. After Buford started building, they were in the house within a year. Chambers got involved in the design of the house because she, too, had ideas of what would work during the building phase.

above The power bath exhibits Torchiere sconces with two arms, a Victoire mirror with antique mercury glass, and a finish of ancient gold.

opposite A small sitting area near the living room windows features a Painted and Parcel gilt stool; a pair of 19th-century hand-colored equestrian prints; a vintage Italian wood table lamp; a pair of early Chinese plates from the Elinor Gordon Collection; a pair of French directoire-style oil paintings in parcel gilt and painted frames; 18th-century Flemish Aubusson tapestry pillows; and a pair of Italian Renaissance armchairs, circa 1860.

"The house is Italian in design, but simple and light," Chambers says. "Mary provided photographs of a house that was her inspiration, but she wanted something more lit, open, and a little simpler. Most people do light moldings and light walls. We, however, did darker trim and light walls. There is a soft tan color in the moldings that gives the house a lot of light, and with luminous limestone floors, the house never gets too dark."

Chambers agrees that everything was smooth sailing, for which she credits Davis, Buford, and Tricia Quaid, of Tricia Quaid Landscape Design, Inc., who constructed the landscape design. "They are all seasoned professionals; the Oliver family hired a superb team!" In addition to the team, Chambers' assistant, Jessica Dixon, helped with designs for the living room and master bedroom. "She is a very talented, hardworking young designer," Chambers says.

The family does a lot of entertaining and Mary says their home is the perfect venue (something Chambers kept in mind as well). I can do the kids' parties with no problem, or throw a big dinner party. I have had the whole Hockaday class here. I wanted the kids to feel like their friends were always welcome here. I did not want a house that did not feel like home," Mary says.

In regards to the landscaping, Quaid sustained the outdoors. She essentially did it all – designed the pool, laid out the gardens, installed the lush landscaping, and did the cabana in back. "I try to marry the outdoor design with the architecture, and the personalities of the homeowners – their lifestyle, as well as what they want to do with the place," Quaid says. "They [the Olivers] wanted a big entertainment area to be able to do the class parties, but wanted fairly low-maintenance, so we achieved that. Some people want the yard just for show. You go there and you're a friend for life. That's how the Olivers are." She hopes her outdoor transformation complements Chambers' interior work. "I love Margaret Chambers – she's dynamite!"

Mary, however, has the highest praise of all for the designer: "There is very little we would change. We love the home." TH&L

above In the hallway there is a French Louis XV mirror, circa 1850, and a 9th-century Persian oil pitcher with blue-green glaze.

opposite In the master bedroom there is a Lorenzo lamp with a hand-painted shade; a pair of Louis XIV armchairs, France, circa 1870; a marquetry-topped side table; and a large pair of brown Fortuny pillows.