

Summer whites

IT TOOK A CREATIVE TEAM AND A WHOLE LOT OF WHITE PAINT TO GIVE THIS OLD HOME A NEW GLOW.

BY JENNIFER BLAISE KRAMER

The Gearharts: Jennaea, Kurt, and kids Jake, Maddy, 9, and Luke, 6.





The kitchen was the ultimate high-low with a mix of IKEA cabinetry and custom systems. The island features IKEA cabinets (even the bar cabinet) and butcher block, however the architects created a custom waterfall with the material down the side to tuck in the microwave and bread drawer. • Albertsson Hansen made the new living room six feet shorter, creating a powder room off the entry and an alcove off the office to fit the piano.



When Jennaea Gearhart saw a glimmer of opportunity to move her family of five back to her native Minnesota, she took it. She researched real estate from their home in New Jersey and scheduled meetings with a few local architects. By the time she met Christine Albertsson and Todd Hansen in their Minneapolis office, a 15-minute chat turned into coffee and lunch. Knowing it was a fit, she asked one final question: "How do you feel about IKEA kitchens?" When the architects responded they had one in their own home, Gearhart cancelled all other meetings.

After a year of house hunting and sketching out the possibilities, Gearhart, Albertsson, and Hansen found a gem on Kenwood Parkway. It had the right scale and number of bedrooms, and it was in need of some love. Despite good bones, the flow was blocked. During intermediate remodeling, an added back closet cut off the cramped kitchen and stairwells, and any connection between the living and dining areas was lost. On top of that, there were drop ceilings, rot, and a lot of saturated color (think burgundy faux leather in the dining room), which darkened the entire living space. All this in a house that was to be the next iteration of the all-white look the family had already created in previous homes out east and in Chicago.

As a designer who turned a "compulsive hobby" into a career, Gearhart knew exactly what she wanted to achieve (within the

boundaries of a fairly tight budget). Every wall, floor, and ceiling would be sprayed the same exact shade of semi-gloss white paint. A couple of painters attacked this project in "space suits with spray guns," with permission to allow a few drops here and there. In fact, Albertsson Hansen's had to resist the temptation to finish every inch of the room to the absolute degree.

"We had to treat the house less reverently, more like a loft, as we weren't trying to achieve perfection," Hansen says.

Hansen and project manager Ian McLellan also devised a plan to improve the flow. They removed the closet in the back and carved out a new powder room up front. Some rooms became smaller, but more functional. In the kitchen, Hansen worked with the client's "asymmetrical spending." On one side, the team designed an integral custom wall that also serves as a structural column with plumbing tracks and technical requirements. On the other, it's all IKEA stainless steel cabinets, which Hansen says can save nearly two-thirds the cost of custom cabinetry. While renovating, the team uncovered two boarded windows; over one they continued their plan of semi-custom, flush open shelving—a sleek, yet substantial, Albertsson Hansen kitchen trademark.

"We like open shelving," Hansen says. "It's all integrated. The cabinetry really defines the space. Rather than applying cabinets to a wall, the cabinetry is the architecture."





Everything—the floors, walls, and ceiling—is painted in Benjamin Moore White Dove semi-gloss paint. With no taping and lots of spray guns, it's a surprisingly cost-effective treatment.



In Maddy's room, Gearhart used Nethercote wallpaper from Hygge & West, the same print used upstairs at The Bachelor Farmer restaurant. • The boys share a three-room suite of bedrooms and a toy room with Legos and duct tape art by mom.



Working in tandem, the architects and Gearhart carved out a new linen closet in a bathroom upstairs without sacrificing much closet space on the bedroom side. Downstairs they mimicked an original tile design from the entryway into the new powder room—designing a “W.C.” in the floor. On the chalkboard wall, they also wrote out “A+H + JHD = 2G2BT” (quick translation: Albertsson Hansen + Jennaea Gearhart Design = Too Good To Be True).

“I’d been a fan of Todd and Christine from afar,” Gearhart says. “I knew our aesthetics were the same—simple and Scandinavian, and that we liked to help save older homes and make them work better.”

During the process, the team salvaged marble in the kitchen and repurposed it

in the bathrooms upstairs. They also discovered pocket doors that were hidden within the dining room walls. The doors now appear in the master suite, which is filled with seagrass, cement tile, and a few hints of color.

Gearhart, a self-described monochromatic designer, has moved her furniture from one home to the next and relies on shades of white and collected antiques to give her home a layered look. She started with a touch of shabby chic and added vintage and modern pieces for a super clean, comfortable feel. Nothing is from the same period and everything is high-low.

In the living area, Ghost chairs mingle with an IKEA console as well as an oversized vintage hotel mirror that she barely let the movers touch. As for the gallery

white aesthetic, it’s been a longtime obsession.

“I love snow and I love my stuff—my pictures, my furniture—and I think you see it better when it’s all white. Plus, when everything’s white, it’s all equally dirty,” says the mother of three.

Relying on slipcovers and porch paint, Gearhart has made her peace with dirt and imperfection. The living room alone operates as a creative design office, a portrait gallery, and a playground for her kids. It’s also been a flower- and candle-filled wedding reception venue for her sister, who recently married.

“Each home has gotten whiter and whiter and whiter,” Gearhart says. “White to me is freedom, and I can do anything I want with it.”

The luxurious third-floor bath features large hexagon floor tile from Fantasia and repurposed kitchen marble on the vanity. To save, shower curtains (which the homeowner happens to love) were used instead of glass.

PHOTOS BY WING TA AND ADAN TORRES FOTOGRAFIA

