

# HEADING SOUTH

When Jon and Keith Meacham move their family from Manhattan to Nashville, they can't help bringing along a bit of urban panache

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It was meant to be a casual tour of real estate, an almost routine exercise, and another component of the conversation Keith and Jon Meacham had been having for the better part of 10 years: What if we left Manhattan? What if the kids could grow up in an actual house? What if we decided on Nashville? The discourse intensified at the start of every school year, when they closed up their summer place in Sewanee, Tennessee (where Jon went to college and now teaches a course), and returned to their Upper East Side apartment (where sisters Mary and Maggie shared a room and brother Sam slept in the tiny maid's quarters off the kitchen).

But in 2011, the conversation changed for good. They fell in love with the first house they saw and made an offer within the week. "Our kids didn't have schools to go to, and we hadn't put our apartment on the market or checked in with the people we worked with," Keith says, still a tad wide-eyed at the boldness of it all. "We weren't any further along with that stuff than we were when we first started talking about it a decade earlier. The house precipitated everything."

The stately brick Georgian, on a hillside in the leafy enclave of Belle Meade, had an attic floor that could serve as a kids' rec room and was surrounded by almost five acres of land—both major selling points. "In the city, we'd have to go down an elevator, through a lobby, and across three major thoroughfares just to get to some

**ABOVE:** Keith Meacham in the backyard of her Nashville home, which was designed by Brockschmidt & Coleman. **LEFT:** A pair of Napoleon III chairs and a 19th-century wing chair surround a custom horsehair-covered ottoman in the living room; the sofa, in a Clarence House fabric, cocktail table, and rug are custom designs, the lanterns are from Ann-Morris, Inc., and the curtains are in a Claremont silk. See Resources.



The color of the dining room walls is inspired by Monticello; the chairs are antique, the 19th-century chandelier is Italian, the large landscape painting is by Sheila Stott Gourlay, and the small one belonged to Keith's grandmother. **FACING PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:** The sofa and armchairs in the sunroom are upholstered in a canvas duck, the Regency library chair is covered in the same Quadrille cotton stripe as the Roman shades; the ceiling fixture is by Visual Comfort, the sisal carpet is by Lenos, and the walls are painted in Duron Paints & Wallcoverings' Palmetto. An 18th-century Swedish settee and a custom-made cocktail table in the living room; the portraits are of Jon's grandparents, Mary, left, and Maggie with Ellie, a springer spaniel, in the entry; the circa-1820 settee is upholstered in horsehair, the pendant light is by the Urban Electric Co., and the wallpaper is by Adelphi Paper Hangings. See Resources.





grass,” says Keith, who has spent her career working in education and recently helped launch the reading app Learn With Homer. The fact that the house needed work was OK, too—while the kids finished out the school year in New York, there was time to finesse the details of the move and plot a thoughtful renovation.

On the ground in Nashville, that meant hiring architect Ridley Wills and the Manhattan-based interior-design team of Bill Brockschmidt and Courtney Coleman. Wills is from Nashville and had known the house growing up; the designers possessed a different kind of familiarity. There were torn pages of the duo’s work in the wish-list folder Keith had kept since the house conversation first started, and Coleman grew up in Keith’s native Mississippi.

Since Jon, a Pulitzer Prize-winning historian and executive vice president at Random House, had decreed early on that there would be no additions to the footprint, the first order of business was to get maximum functionality from each room. To create the large kitchen Keith had forever dreamed of, Wills stole space from the formerly grand dining room. The new round dining room can still seat a dozen, while the kitchen is now the bustling center of family life, complete with a dramatic range hood made by a local metalworker that Brockschmidt likens to a hearth.

The sunroom off the living room was transformed into a library and office for Jon via a coat of dark blue paint and matching wool curtains that balance the wall of bookshelves without closing off the views. Jon’s collection of historical prints is ingeniously hung from brass chains atop the room’s existing half-columns.

The blue is an example of the designers’ deft use of color, one of the things that had attracted Keith to them. In the entry, for example, an early-19th-century Adelphi wallpaper was custom colored to include a bold orange and provides an unexpectedly perfect background for the maps and modern photographs that line the walls. The adjoining



Jon’s office features a circa-1890 chesterfield, a pair of Edwardian armchairs, and a circa-1830 English pedestal table; the walls are painted to match the curtains, in a Holland & Sherry wool with trim by Samuel & Sons, and the rug is antique. **FACING PAGE:** A chandelier from a church hangs in the kitchen; the range is by Dacor, and the cabinetry, painted in Farrow & Ball’s Estate Eggshell in Mouse’s Back, and range hood are custom designs. See Resources.



dining room's warm egg-yolk color was inspired by the revamped dining room at Monticello, where Jon—the author of, most recently, *Thomas Jefferson: The Art of Power*—has been a frequent visitor.

Keith jokes that since she was overseeing the project from afar, “my natural impatience, the source of many a decorating error, was never allowed to take over. Since we weren’t living there, I was never pressured to make everything instantly complete.” It also meant that she, Coleman, and Brockschmidt had “lots of fun” engaging in a year’s worth of “thoughtful shopping,” since the contents of the Manhattan apartment filled the third-floor attic space and not much else.

The result is a charming collection of distinct rooms that flow easily and are constantly put to maximum use. The kitchen, filled with books and dogs, children and drop-in visitors, is the gathering spot that all had hoped for. Jon, whose only requests were for a leather chesterfield sofa and a pair of springer spaniels, got all three.

“Keith’s spirit is reflected in so much of the house,” Coleman says. “It is truly personal, from the acres of books to the Southern art to Jon’s collections of political memorabilia.” Best of all, the house’s inhabitants are thriving in their adopted city—and there’s plenty of grass right outside the door. ■

In the sitting area off the master bedroom, the sofa and bergère are upholstered in a custom-printed cotton by Hazelton House, which was also used for the curtains. The custom bench is upholstered in a Holly Hunt fabric, and the cocktail table is Chinese; the shelving unit is by West Elm, and the walls are painted in Farrow & Ball’s Estate Emulsion in Blackened. **FACING PAGE:** The 19th-century tester bed was found in Tennessee, and the carpet is by Lenos. See Resources.

