

Crafting sanctuary

INTERIOR DESIGNER
TRACI ZELLER HELPS
A MINT HILL COUPLE
ACHIEVE THEIR IDEAL
COUNTRY ESTATE.

BY VIRGINIA BROWN
PHOTOGRAPHS BY DUSTIN PECK

Traci Zeller didn't enter the interior-design business in a traditional way. After earning a law degree from the University of Virginia, Zeller practiced law for about four years before becoming a business consultant for Fortune 500 companies. Then, she and her husband built their own home.

"I loved the process," Zeller says, and she began offering her natural knack for design to help friends and family. When her twin boys were born, she left her full-time job and started designing in earnest.

That was in 2004. By 2010, she was all-in with her boutique-design business, and this year, Traci Zeller Interiors is celebrating its 10th anniversary. "I love helping people live well in their homes," Zeller says. "Our home is a sanctuary and refuge — you should feel good and happy when you're there."

One of her latest projects is a Grandfather Homes design in Cheval, a Mint Hill community with a country estate-meets-equestrian feel. Residential designer Robert T. Foster prepared the architectural design, and interior designer Tammy Coulter selected the tile, cabinets and countertops, among other accents.





While Zeller didn't help the family select paint colors or light fixtures, "I got to layer the decorating on top of this beautiful shell," she says, adding that the family was seeking a warm and comfortable vibe.

"From a practical perspective, we wanted to use long-lasting fabrics and rugs that are both durable and easy to maintain," says the homeowner, who wishes to remain anonymous. "With pets and kids, we needed to ensure that our furnishings would be suitable for a busy household — no stress over the occasional spilled drink or muddy paw print."

Zeller's next step was to create floor plans that emphasized the couple's wishes. She and her team met with the homeowners to go over every part of the furniture layout, down to the placement of each lamp and piece of fabric. Touching and feeling samples gives her clients confidence, she says. "I want to see what makes them light up. ... It's a really important check-in point before we deliver their design."

For this Cheval home, a bold floral drapery fabric in the living space proved a key component for the look. The banquette in the breakfast nook borrows the coloring from that fabric to extend the feel into the open kitchen space.



Creativity struck when Zeller learned that the couple loves theater. Working with existing accents like an autographed *Jersey Boys* poster, she had the idea to frame sound waves from three of their favorite Broadway tunes to hang on the wall of the home theater. “It was a nod to who they are and what they love without being overly literal,” Zeller says.

In the guest suite, a powerful statement painting of a horse was another personal touch, hinting at the clients’ roots in the Keeneland racetrack area of Kentucky.

“My husband really wanted the guest suite to have a Kentucky theme,” the homeowner says. “At first the word ‘theme’ worried me, but Traci was an expert at interpreting what my husband really wanted. ... We worked with Traci to select artwork and accessories that complement Kentucky’s equine history and my husband’s love of all-things derby,” including a bar cart stocked with carefully selected bourbons.

“This is a great example of a home that can be beautiful and live really well,” Zeller says. “The home really functions for them as a couple, and works for larger gatherings with extended family,” she says.



“Oftentimes we scroll through magazines and social media for inspiration and try to recreate things we see,” the homeowner says. “That’s a fine place to start. However, this process taught us that the home we truly wanted wasn’t about replicating an exact look or style. It was about creating a space that makes us feel happy and that complements the things in life we want to celebrate — from everyday dinners with family, holiday gatherings, to quiet evenings with two spoiled-rotten dogs that sit on any sofa, pillow or chair they please.” **SP**