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Big Ideas from the Big Easy

New Orleans native Katie Stassi jazzed up her Houston rancher with the style and wit of her Louisiana hometown.

BY JENNIFER BERNO,
PHOTOGRAPHY TRIA GIOVAN,
STYLING SUSANNA SHOWERS MOLDAWER



To make an old house look new, follow Katie Stassi's lead and apply stucco to a basic brick exterior. The checkerboard walkway adds a bit of whimsy.



Great Idea!

We love that Katie painted her Shaker-style kitchen cabinets a soothing blue but kept the moving parts white—a great way to add charm and a crisp pop of color.



LEFT: Katie replaced the upper cabinetry with modern art to open up her small kitchen. Her daughters, Susan, 8, and Sophia, 6, gather around the Carrara marble-topped island to help mom cook. **ABOVE:** Katie created a casual breakfast nook just off the kitchen using a comfortable slipcovered banquette, a sleek glass table, and iconic Eames side chairs—no built-ins required!

When I left New Orleans, I was in architecture shock," says designer Katie Stassi, recalling a rough transition when she moved to Houston about 10 years ago. "I missed the New Orleans flair," she says. So Katie set out to infuse Garden District charm into a basic brick rancher using a mix of modern furnishings and fine antiques.

Getting the Look Katie was attracted to her 1968 house for its simple lines and windowless front facade. "I think it looked frightening to most people because it was extremely run-down, but I knew it was a little jewel," she says. To update the exterior, Katie applied stucco to the brick; added sleek, inset-glass front doors; and completely refurbished the yard with manicured trees and a checkerboard walkway. "The clean, simple landscaping tells you what to expect inside the house," she says.

When it comes to design, Katie says she has a dual personality. "I could live in a modern glass house or a French château. I go from one extreme to the other, and I love contrasts. I just blend everything so it flows," she says. Her tip for blending that works: Use one main color on large furniture pieces, and then accent with a few other shades incorporated through accessories like lamps or pillows. In her house, Katie painted almost every room white and bleached the parquet floors to achieve a light finish. The white walls are the perfect backdrop for her collection of modern artwork, punctuated with antique French mirrors.

At-Home Oasis To open up the choppy floor plan, Katie took down a wall that divided the kitchen and the breakfast area, and she removed upper cabinets. She stores everything in low, deep drawers, which are accessible to daughters Susan and Sophia.

All in all, Katie's house has an easy-elegant feel. "We don't get to travel as much as we'd like, so I figured, why not make our home as special as a vacation?" she says. In fact, Katie may have taken her Houston rancher on a trip all the way back to New Orleans. **turn to page 38**

Love It? Get It! See sources, page 130



TOP: Don't be afraid to mix old and new: Katie blends comfy slipcovered sofas with a 1940s French acrylic coffee table and antique Louis XVI armchairs.

ABOVE: Katie bleached her original parquet floors for a modern look. Tip: Hire a pro for this because it requires extensive sanding and sealing.

Katie's Crescent City Influences

As a New Orleans native, Katie appreciates the city's penchant for combining old-fashioned with up-to-date. Here are some elements Katie used to marry old and new in her stylish Houston home.

1. Rebecca Vizard pillows on the sofas (at left): "Not only is Becky a Louisiana native, but she is also a friend of mine," says Katie, who accessorized her simple, white sofas with elaborate pillows made from antique appliques. "Her creativity in utilizing vintage textiles in a modern way draws me to her collection. I've stocked up on pillows for myself and many clients." www.bviz.com

2. Living room lamps: Inspired by the New Orleans tendency to reinterpret conventional ideas, Katie discovered two gilded wooden architectural forms at an antiques fair and then converted them into a pair of sculptural table lamps (one is pictured above, left). "Balanced on thick acrylic bases and topped off with simple linen shield shades, they're a great example of old made new," says Katie.

3. Artwork in the kitchen: Instead of bulky cabinets, Katie hung a triptych created by Meredith Pardue, a Louisiana artist, above the sink in her kitchen. While a traditional landscape painting might have been too fussy, an updated nature-inspired work is a perfect fit in Katie's modern home. "I am a minimalist, and I love to surround myself with nature. Pardue's artwork is a fresh approach to that." www.meredithpardue.com

4. Silk taffeta curtains in the dining room: "The curtains were a gift from my parents, who live in New Orleans, so they are sentimental to me," says Katie. "Silk taffeta curtains are legendary in New Orleans. Not only are they a toast to the beautiful ball gowns that sweep across the floor during Mardi Gras, but they're also our way of dressing a window in an elegant and formal way." For a similar look, try *Mila Style taffeta drapery* at www.silktrading.com. ●