

SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2012

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SIMPLY BELGIAN

THAT COOL, SPARE, AND SOULFUL FLEMISH STYLE SUFFUSES A NEWLY BUILT GEORGIA HOUSE WITH A GORGEOUS SENSE OF HISTORY.

When a stylish Atlanta woman asked the designer James Michael Howard to create a clean, quietly intriguing house for her family, Howard had her over to his office to get a better sense of what she was after. "I have a thousand books there," he says. "People are visual, so I kept putting things in front of her."

She gravitated to modernism in general, but was most clearly attracted to the sensual, tactile brand of Belgian modernism perfected by Axel Vervoordt, the renowned Antwerp-based antiques dealer and interior designer. "She's Polish and she's been in a lot of important



INTERIOR DESIGN BY JAMES MICHAEL HOWARD ARCHITECTURE BY WILLIAM T. BAKER
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MAX KIM-BEE PRODUCED BY LESLIE NEWSOM RASCOE WRITTEN BY MIMI READ



European houses,” Howard says. “There’s a sense of restraint and a monastic quality she likes.” It’s one thing to achieve Vervoordt’s chic monasticism by floating a long linen sofa inside a splintering medieval room in Antwerp. Conjuring that same primeval mood inside a brand new residence in Buckhead, however, might seem like a challenge. But the French-style manse in question is by architect William T. Baker, who gave it mullioned windows, hipped roofs, and a buff stucco façade. And Howard is a great visual translator who loves mellowed European glamour hitched to a spare sensibility. He’s also not afraid to adapt.

First, he took pains with the interior details to get a natural, timeless background: real plaster walls, chaste stone mantles, simple baseboard moldings, and French oak floors stained dark with aniline dye normally used on leather. Less viscous than oil stains, the dye lets curling patterns in the wood grain show through clearly.

In the living and family rooms, Howard gave the couple and their two teenage daughters clean, light arrangements of sofas and chairs slip-covered in sturdy linen. As far as color goes, his fabrics hover in the poetic, earthy zone between driftwood and stone, and they look great against chalky walls. “Doesn’t everyone love a white cotton blouse and a beige cotton skirt?” he asks.



Dappled, color-washed walls bring depth to the dining room. Vintage Georgian-style chairs in Donghia chenille. Curtains in Duralee velvet. Sconce, Urban Electric. **OPPOSITE:** Sofa, Dennis & Leen, in Henry Calvin linen. Wing chair, Gregorius Pineo, in Jasper fabric. Custom armchair in Brunswick & Fils chenille. Leather armchairs, Oly. Curtains in Rose Tarlow Melrose House wool. Antique end table, Mrs. Howard. **OPENING PAGES:** Mantel, François & Co. Walls in Bare, Benjamin Moore. Flowers throughout, Nancy Izlar.

Weathered wood and soft plaster warm up the cool-toned family room. Sofa and armchairs, Lee Industries, in Donghia linen. Coffee table, Oly. Mantel, François & Co. Floor lamps and dining chairs, Mrs. Howard. Rug, Prestige Mills. Walls in China White, Benjamin Moore.



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“WE'RE **exposed** TO SO MUCH IN THIS 21ST CENTURY.
WE LIKE IT ALL—AND THERE'S NOTHING WRONG WITH LIKING IT ALL.”





With rich marble and quartersawn oak, a pared-down kitchen has real presence. Custom cabinets and island. Countertops, Walker Zanger. Cabinet hardware, Restoration Hardware. Stools, Design Within Reach. Pendant lamps, Flos.