

BY PHILIP MORRIS  
PHOTOGRAPHED BY CHERYL DALTON

# open to interpretation

In Greenville, South Carolina, architects Mark and Melissa Maresca realize the full potential of a 1920s house they have long admired and now call home





Pediments were added above the central hall openings to the dining and living rooms and repeated inside. Framed architectural engravings reflect the Marescas' interests. PREVIOUS PAGES: An existing wall was replaced with a wide arch echoing the entry fan-light and extending the hall through the heart of the house.



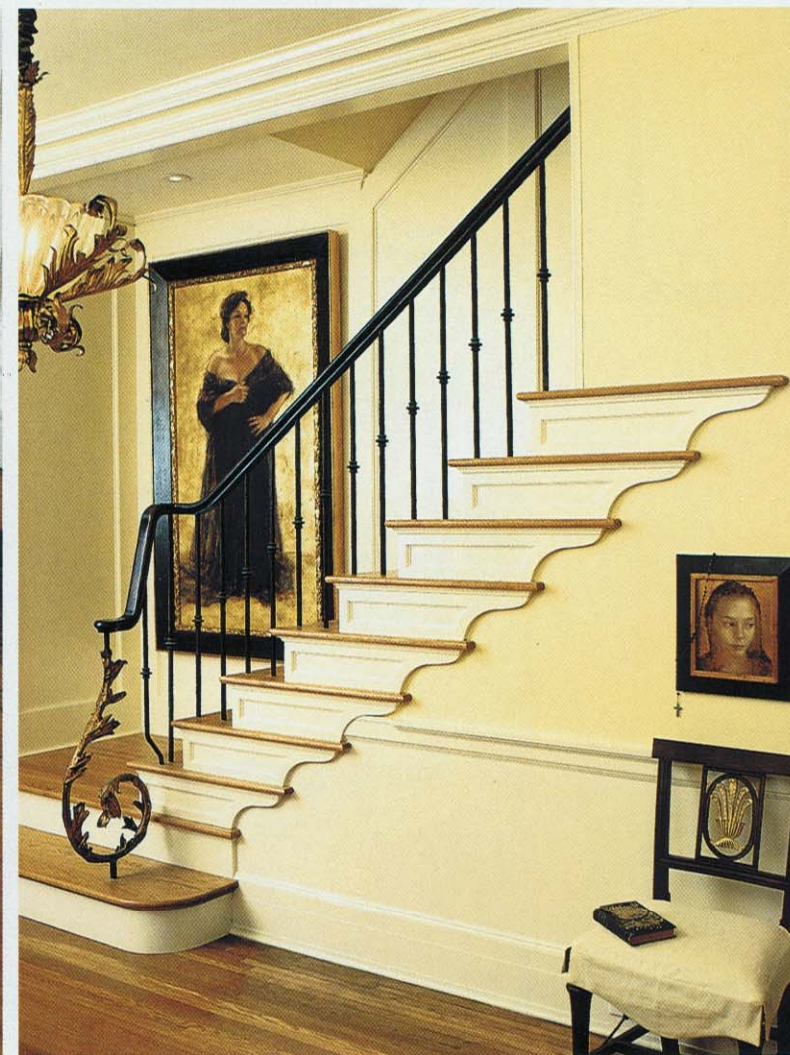
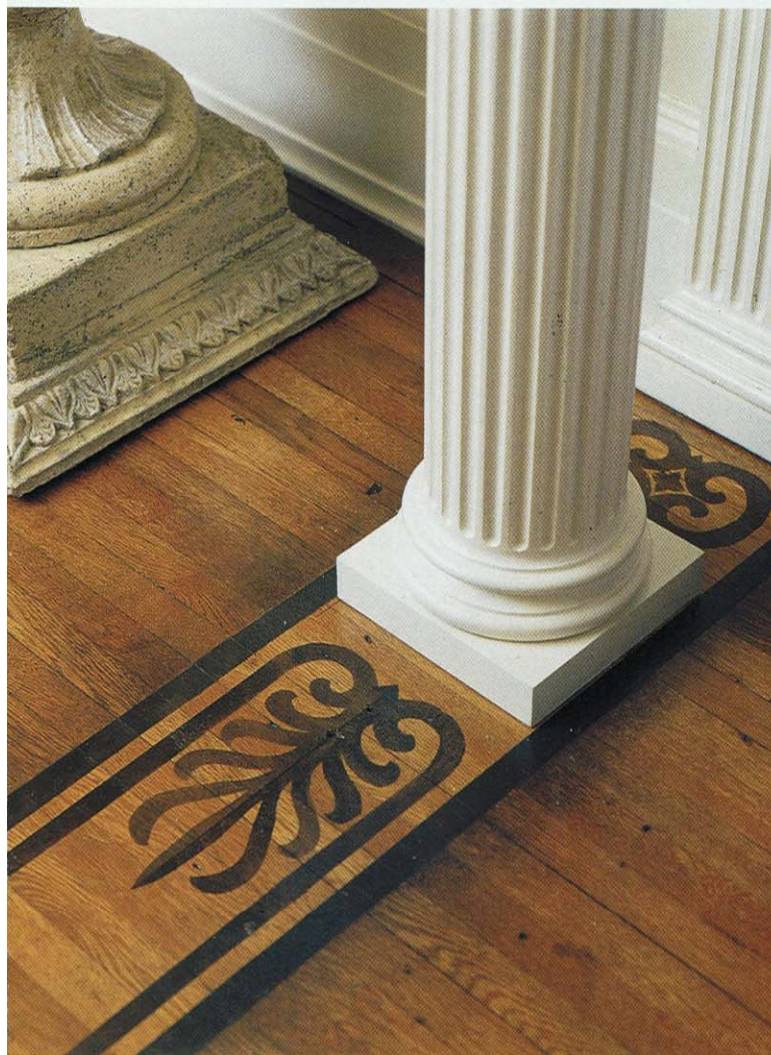
**I**t's a bit like a fairy tale. A 14-year-old boy who aspires to be an architect sees a house that he knows he wants to live in one day. He does become an architect, and many years later he and his wife, also an architect, buy the house and make it their own.

"I saw the house after my family moved to Greenville," says Mark Maresca. "When Melissa and I first got married and lived nearby, I told her we were going to live there. We met the owner, who had a party for us and got to know and like our work. Later, when he was in his 80s and decided to sell the house he loved so much, he called to say there was a long list of people who wanted it, but we could have first choice, so we jumped."

That was just over five years ago, and since then they have put their hearts and talents into bringing out the house's full architectural potential. Designed in the 1920s in what Mark calls "Jeffersonian classical" style, most notably for its temple-form front porch, the house was well built and gave clear signals for further classical refinement. "The porch and front door with its gracefully detailed fan-light were fine and led into a generous entry hall, but the house did not have a strong axis," he says. "Halfway into the house, the center hall just stopped with a wall and two insignificant doors, an odd termination."

That wall came out, and the 11-by-52-foot hall now leads to a generous library—the family's casual living area—formerly divided into a tiny den, a hallway, and a closet. "That grand hallway may seem like a real indulgence, but we walk through it all the time, the dog sleeps there, and





LEFT: Window sashes and doors in the living room and throughout the house are painted black in classical tradition. The owners' favorite pieces stand free like sculpture. ABOVE: The acanthus leaf in the antique Venetian chandelier inspired both the stenciled floor pattern, left, and the gilt steel newel post for the new stair in the hall, right.

that's where the tree goes at Christmas," Mark says. "We don't spend time there, but we enjoy the sense of volume and flow it brings."

They also opened up the adjacent kitchen, consolidating space that had been divided into four rooms: a cook's station, a food pantry, a broom closet, and a butler's pantry. The ceilings were raised to 11 feet to match adjoining rooms. Upper cabinets were replaced with a pantry designed like a large cupboard. A large stainless steel island was built, and a classical black-and-white diamond pattern floor in rubber tile was installed.

They preserved some of the 1950s cabinets while introducing others closer to the house's original period.

"We loved the style of the house, but we had to rethink how to make it work for the way we live now. That meant opening up the size and height to make the spaces we'd be spending the most time in more exciting. Overall, the house is now much more open and stronger in plan. We didn't want to overwhelm the original but enhance it," Mark says.

At the front of the house, they added pediments above the wide openings from the hall into the flank-

ing living and dining rooms and repeated them on the inside walls. Moldings in these spaces were "bumped up," as Mark puts it, again to strengthen the classical bones. A column-supported arch built where the dead-end wall once stood echoes the fan shape over the front door, while a simpler arch frames the wide opening into the library at the opposite end. The hall is also architecturally enriched with a stenciled band and acanthus leaf pattern on the floor, aligned with the columned arch. On the new stair leading to their daughters' bedrooms in the formerly



Created from three small rooms, the library at the end of the central hall accommodates the Marescas' casual living. Walls are dark brown, and the wood paneling at the fireplace has an aged rosewood finish. The couple designed the large, low table, the scrolled limestone fireplace, and the tailored linen table skirt.



unused attic space, the newel post provides another flourish: a scroll in the shape of an unfolding acanthus leaf. The Marescas modeled the template from paper and had it fabricated by Asheville Iron Works in North Carolina. Figure in the crisply framed architectural engravings that flank the entry to the two front rooms, and it is evident why the couple takes such pleasure in the hall's resolution.

A clear aesthetic idea also drives

their approach to finishes and furnishings. The walls of the two formal front rooms are painted with five coats of high-gloss, thinned-down oil paint to produce a deep orange-yellow. Windows and doors here and throughout are painted black, which seems an unusual choice, but Mark traces its architectural roots. "It's very classical. Jefferson did it at Monticello, though he used ebony. Black is a little different." The effect adds to the

sense of transparency. The panes take on the look of a delicate tracery, not unlike leaded glass.

Furnishings are traditional, but the overall feeling is fresh and open. The two favor pieces where the structure is beautiful, like the Sheraton chairs in the living room or the Greek Revival poster bed in the master bedroom. And they let elements, whether an antique chaise or a painting or a grid of architectural prints, stand on their





LEFT: To make an ample kitchen, four small rooms were combined, the ceiling was raised, and upper cabinets were removed. ABOVE: The temple-form front porch most notably signifies what Mark Maresca calls the "Jeffersonian classical" style of the 1920s house. BELOW: Melissa and Mark in their office located in the former carriage house.







ABOVE: An early 19th-century Greek Revival bed in the master bedroom reflects the architects' preference for strong structural pieces. Most windows in the house are uncurtained, but wood blinds here provide privacy and light control. LEFT: The couples' design for a sideboard incorporates a Doric temple front by Michelangelo, which is inlaid on the push-latch doors.

own with room to breathe.

This bold assurance comes through noticeably in the library. Here the walls are a dark, almost black shade that Mark calls "Melissa brown." To each side of the fireplace, architectural engravings appear again, but this time floating in glass without mats, the dark wall behind serving that purpose.

A wall of floor-to-ceiling shelves and paneling surrounding the fireplace were given a finish resembling aged rosewood by Sarkif, a Greenville decorative painter. The Marescas designed the marble-top table and the scrolled limestone mantel that, along with the seagrass rug, contrast dramatically with the dark back-

ground. Ample natural light comes in through a large window and doors fitted with transoms to emphasize their height. These are dramatic effects, certainly, but restrained and refined—and also comfortable. ♦

For details, see *Sourcebook*, page 209. For more ideas from the Marescas' home: [southernaccents.com](http://southernaccents.com)