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uilt in 1865, the Greek Revival house in New Orleans that interior designer Michelle R. Smith calls home is a beacon of ease and refinement. Designed by the society architect Myrlin McCullar, the home's well-preserved period rooms were a draw for Smith when she decided to relocate from New York City with her young family. And when it comes to impressive architecture, she's in good company. "All the houses on this street are different," Smith observes of her neighbors in the city's Garden District. "Every time I take a walk, I notice a new detail."

Smith grew up in Berwick, Louisiana, where her parents still live, about an hour and a half outside New Orleans. She moved to New York City 15 years ago for law school, then, after a year as a practicing litigator, pursued a graduate degree in tax law. "It was really just an excuse to come to New York," she says of that period in her life. "I worked long enough at a law firm to understand what that future looked like, and I couldn't see it for me."

So Smith went in an entirely new direction. Determined to pursue her growing interest in interiors, she interned with Daniel Romualdez, learning everything she could before starting her own design firm, Studio MRS, in Brooklyn in 2013. Since then, she has built a reputation for timeless interiors that are as livable as they are interesting. "Her work is comfortable and approachable, but in nearly every space there is something curious, something

RIGHT: The entry to the home, where the front door is painted in Benjamin Moore's Limestone.

OPPOSITE: In the dining room, the chandelier is original to the house. Vintage chairs and tablecloth in Pierre Frey fabrics; curtains of a Fortuny sheer; photograph above mantel by Hong Lei. remarkable," says Shane Robuck, the Atlanta antiques dealer who is one of Smith's go-tos.

In November 2020, Smith and her partner, the documentary filmmaker Sebastiano Tomada, made the move to New Orleans with their son, Bash, now four years old. The idea was for Smith to commute to her office in New York City, allowing Bash to spend more time with his extended family down South. "I grew up near New Orleans and went to Tulane," Smith says. "With my parents close by and a big friend group with kids my son's age, it was easy to make the switch from New York to New Orleans."

Smith wasted no time in drawing up plans for a renovation. Wanting to preserve as much of the historic house as possible, she kept alterations to a minimum. A few walls were moved, some bathrooms were redone, and a dark, paneled study leading to the garden became a bright and airy kitchen. Six months after she closed on the house, Smith and her family moved in.

Everything had gone so smoothly that surely something would go wrong—and it did. When the moving truck arrived from New York with her furniture and possessions, "every single thing was either broken or covered in what looked like animal fur," says Smith. "Every chair had three legs. It was madness!"

She salvaged and repaired everything she could and was able to save most of her cherished belongings. Today, the house is filled with memories: A guest room's vintage brass bed has been in her possession since she found it soon







after moving to New York. "My mother and I carried that bed frame for blocks," she recalls. The Baker chairs in the primary bedroom have been with her since she was in law school. An ornate Italian center table from the 1940s draws the subtle charm that old objects bring. "You can't have a attention in the corner of the family room, just as it did in whole room be new," Smith says. "You want things you

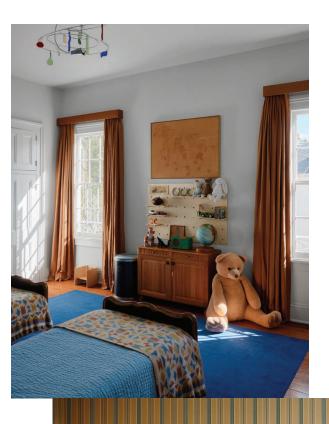
Both she and Tomada favor a mix of old and new. "Growing up in Italy in a house filled with 16th-century furniture, I've always had a need to add modern accents," he says. "Michelle knows how to incorporate that classic European style with the comforts of modern living."

To that end, the couple acquired a few strategic new pieces for the house, the most dramatic of which is the living room's nine-foot-long sofa. And if its size isn't

impressive enough, the sofa's striped Loro Piana upholstery adds even more drama. But in Smith's magical hands it all works; even a boldly striped giant can live in harmony amid won't see everywhere. You need things with character."

> "You can't have a whole room be new. You need things with character."

—MICHELLE R. SMITH



LEFT: Garnet Hill quilts
cover twin beds in
Bash's room. Vintage
cabinet by Carl
Malmsten; pendant by
Artemide; curtains
fa Fortuny linen; rug
by Patterson Flynn.

BELOW: In Bash's
bathroom, the oil
painting is by his
paternal grandfather.
Custom tiles by
Quemere Designs;
fixtures by Barber
Wilsons.

