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# HOLIDAY HOME

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# *Full House*

THE HIGGINS HOME WAS THOUGHTFULLY DESIGNED FOR A LARGE BLENDED FAMILY TO GATHER WITH LOTS OF FOOD, FELLOWSHIP, AND FUN—ESPECIALLY DURING THE HOLIDAY SEASON.



When Elizabeth and Tom Higgins found a house in an established neighborhood on Lake Lanier in Gainesville, Georgia, they also found a place where their large family could feel right at home. The original house was built in 1964, but in 2015, with the idea of creating a home their entire family could enjoy together, the Higginses took down the original structure and rebuilt. “We took the bricks from the original house and used them on the front steps, porch, foyer floor, and bar backsplash,” Elizabeth says. “The goal for this house was to ‘build it and they will come.’ We wanted all seven of our adult children—and their spouses, friends, and future children—to have a home where they could blend and all be together as a family.”

And that’s exactly what they did. Creating a space where everyone feels at home starts with the décor style. In May 2016, the couple moved in, and Elizabeth enlisted the help of interior designer and friend Maggie Griffin of Maggie Griffin Design to help incorporate her older pieces and style them with a fresh, updated





"I have been lucky to inherit some special pieces from my grandmother and mother, which have been a staple in my style," Elizabeth says. "I wanted to marry those with a fresh look."

look. The primary goal when it came to decorating, Elizabeth shares, was creating a welcoming atmosphere. And from the moment you walk through the window-paned door flanked by shining lanterns and festive urns filled with mini evergreens, you're engulfed in holiday spirit that beckons you inside. "From riding by, walking in, and all the way through the house and down to the lake, we wanted to make it feel like Christmas," Elizabeth says, adding that she loves using fresh greenery from the yard—and a few Fraser fir scraps from a Christmas tree lot—both inside and out.

Inside, the living room truly glistens, with a stunning 9-foot Christmas tree decked in white lights and adorned with ornaments, from years past to new. "We all gather around the tree, with fires going inside and out on the porch, to open gifts," Elizabeth says. "Every seat is taken!" The living room is open to the kitchen, which allows for the perfect place to gather.





Beginning on December 22, the Higgins family cooks every meal for all the different crowds through Christmas. "We make hot buttered rum for our Christmas Eve dinner and serve it in my mother's copper urn," Elizabeth shares.



"The minute I walk into our dining room, I think of my grandmother," Elizabeth says. "I remember Christmas Eve at her house in Atlanta, Georgia. Her table sparkled with gold, red, and crystal. It was magical!" Elizabeth has since inherited some of those cherished pieces that set the stage for every holiday or intimate dinner. "I try to recreate that magic and make sure our children and future grandchildren appreciate the incredible beauty of her collections."



“Everyone knows the kitchen is the heart of the home, so we wanted to expand on that by making the living and kitchen area our center. Literally all roads lead to that area,” she says. “Our cooking, dining, sleeping, and even other living areas come off of that space. From the time you step in the front foyer, the living area opens up and takes your eye straight to the lake.”

With a house filled with family, the kitchen is a near constant hub of activity during the holidays. “Every Christmas Eve, we host several families for dinner. We’ve done it for years,” Elizabeth says. “The kids have literally grown up together, and this tradition is more important to them than even us parents.” They always serve Tom’s mother’s steak soup and within a couple hours, all the 20- and 30-somethings are in a big circle in the downstairs living room and bar, laughing and playing their favorite game, Fishbowl. Elizabeth says that “getting to bed early on Christmas Eve isn’t nearly as important as it was in the early years!”







In the master suite, Elizabeth opts for a more simple approach to holiday décor with the subtle addition of gilded reindeer and freshly clipped greens. The serene space is anchored by a neutral bed from Ballard Designs and luxuriously cozy bedding from Annie Selke, and the patterned accent lamps and rug add a refined pop of blue.





For this large family, an outdoor entertaining space was an absolute must. The back porch provides a clear view of the beautiful Lake Lanier and a panoramic glimpse of the garden and allows for an outdoor living space for parties or visiting family and friends. “Our outdoor porch is an extension of our living room,” Elizabeth says. “We add a live tree with large colored lights, more greenery, garland, and Christmas décor to continue the feel. We catch many a family member sitting in front of the fire on that porch during the holidays with a cup of coffee in the morning or a glass of wine in the evening.”

Christmas in the Higgins home is, in a word, full. “With 10 adult children [including three spouses] and 50 or so people in our immediate extended family, Christmas and the days before are full of people and

food,” Elizabeth says. The family celebrates Christmas morning—which the Higginses agree is whatever day they’re all together the week of Christmas—with a traditional breakfast casserole and cinnamon rolls. “We still start with opening the Santa filled stockings and then we go around the room, ascending by age, opening one gift at a time,” she says. Knitted Christmas stockings for each of their kids hang on the stairwell. “The mantel just won’t handle it!” Elizabeth admits.

And while it may not be the home the family grew up in, Elizabeth and Tom have taken special care to make it feel welcoming for everyone. When asked of her holiday décor style, Elizabeth simply says, “‘There’s no place like home.’ We wanted our kids to arrive and feel like they’re surrounded by their Christmas memories.” ❄️