

# DETROIT DESIGN

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## Fa La La Farmhouse Flair

Family and fun are at the heart of the 5,200-square-foot, six-bedroom home all year long. That's exactly what Jenny and Chris, who founded the Goldfish Swim School, had in mind when they decided to build in 2013.

By **Khrist S**

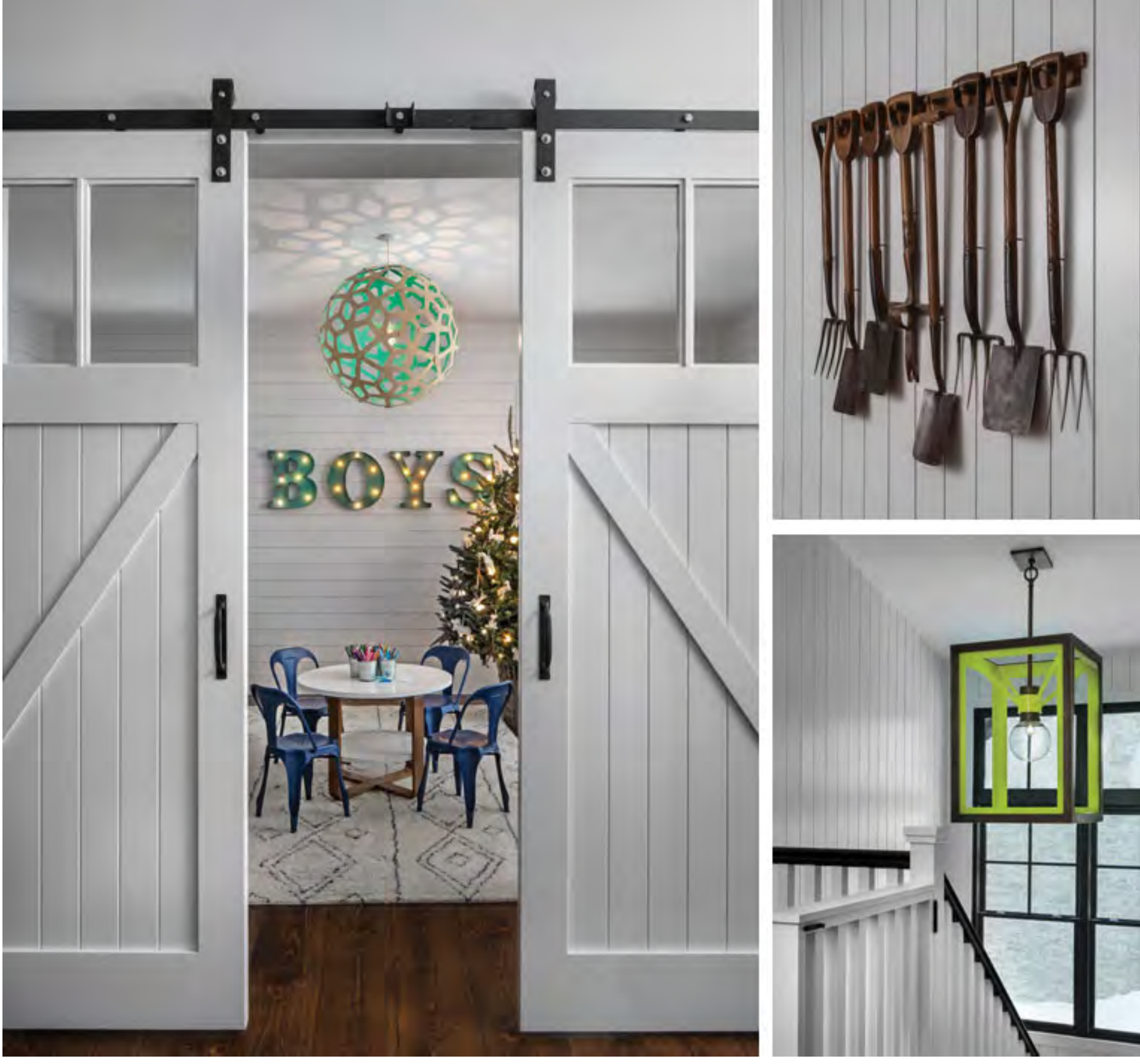


Christmas comes early to the McCuiston household in Birmingham. "My husband, Chris, is obsessed with Christmas music, so the minute it comes on the radio it's playing in our house," homeowner Jenny McCuiston says.

"He loves the classics, Bing Crosby and such. Chris especially likes the jazzy, 'Home Alone' version of 'I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas,'" she says, adding that it can often be heard as the family goes about their pre-holiday activities. "We usually turn up the music and decorate as a family," Jenny says.

Traditions at the McCuiston home, built in 2015, include cutting and decorating two trees (one for show and one just for the kids — Charlie, 9; Jack, 7; Brody, 5; and Reid, 3), and a baking free-for-all, which Jenny says sometimes includes two final products. "Our cookies aren't always the pretty kind," she says with a laugh. "I cut out the sugar cookies and let the boys go to town. They taste good, but we don't give those to the neighbors." She makes others, she says, to give to friends and family.

Family and fun are at the heart of the 5,200-square-foot, six-bedroom home all year long. That's exactly what Jenny and Chris, who founded the Goldfish Swim School, had in mind when they decided to build in 2013. Jenny grew up nearby and always wanted to move back to the north side of Birmingham. "It's quieter and there's less traffic," she says of their idyllic, tree-lined street. For awhile, she says, she was actually canvassing the neighborhood looking for a house to buy, and dropped letters into the mailboxes of potential sellers.



Unusual antique European pitchforks and shovels are also from Zieben Mare. Sliding barn doors lead to the boys' playroom.

Eventually the right site appeared. After taking down a small home previously on the lot, the couple got to work. They hired Jeff Klatt of Royal Oak's Krieger Klatt Architects, designer Lynn Witmer of Witmer Design in Bloomfield Hills, and Great Lakes Custom Builder, in Troy, as partners. "Jenny had a really clear idea of what she wanted," Witmer recalls. The pair had mutual friends, and Jenny had admired Lynn's clean-lined and classic style on area home tours, which fit well with the Modern Farmhouse look the McCuistons wanted.

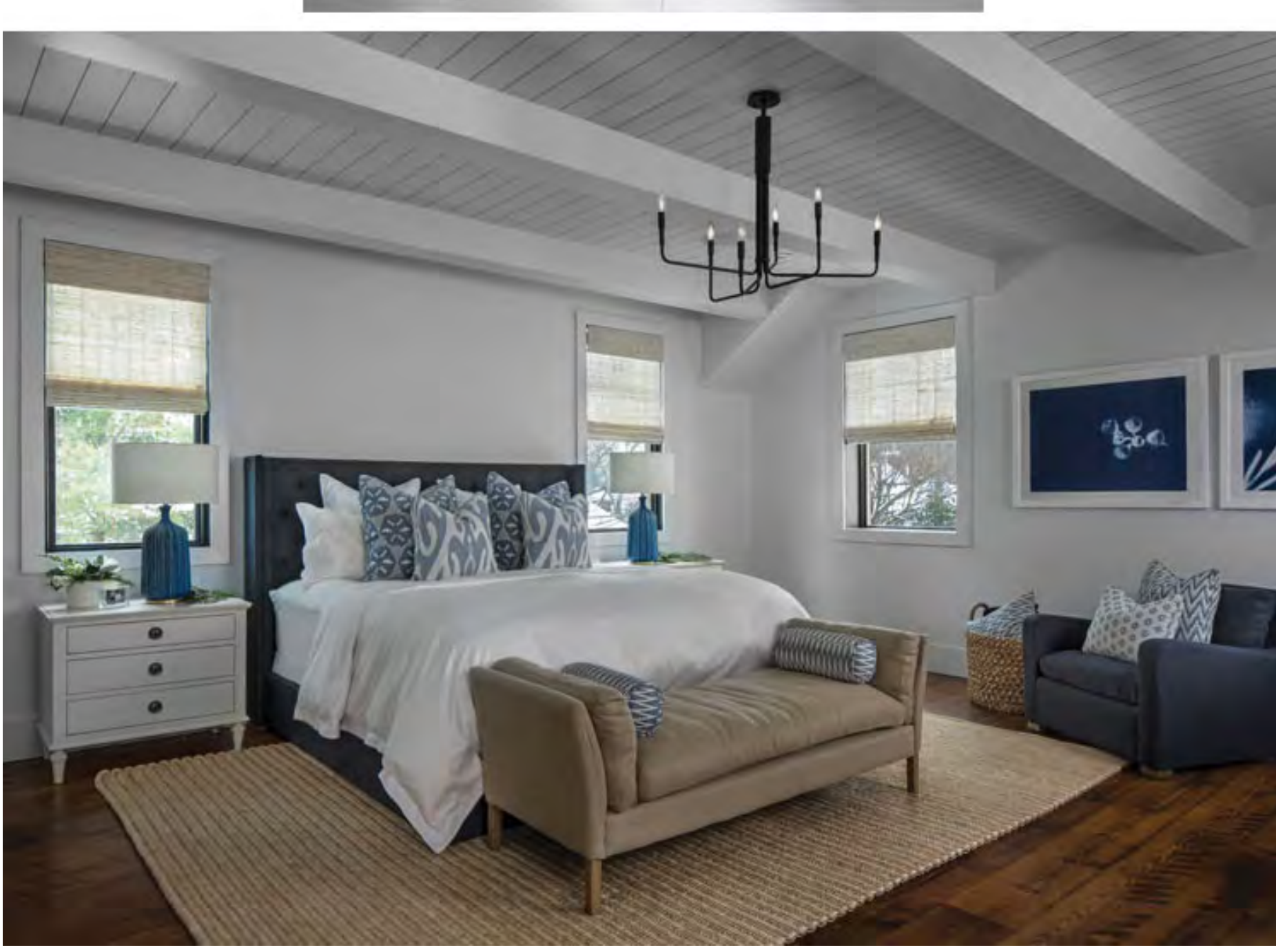
"Jenny is very whimsical and loves color, but is also sophisticated. The house is all of those things." — Lynn Witmer

The homeowner and designer hit it off immediately. "We worked hand in hand," Jenny says, including "(spending) hours and hours shopping and (eating) a lot of Greek salads. The one thing I told Lynn from the beginning was that it had to be kid-friendly."

That translated into high-performance materials and "very durable" furnishings, Witmer says. White shiplap used both horizontally and vertically on the walls, rolling barn doors, and rustic wood elements are true to the home's classic-yet-contemporary style. "We wanted it to feel comfortable and welcoming, like a farmhouse but with a little modern flair," Jenny says.

For ease and practicality, they opted for casual, comfortable furnishings from big box stores, but with high-end touches — such as the light fixtures found in the kitchen, the hall to the second floor, and other areas that were sure to be safe from little hands. While the furnishings and accessories are true to the now-popular Modern Farmhouse style, they're not predictable, Witmer says, and the house truly reflects the people who live in it. "Jenny is very whimsical and loves color, but is also sophisticated," she says. "The house is all of those things."

Highlights include the user-friendly kitchen, one of Jenny's favorite rooms. "We love to cook and entertain," she says. Featuring a large stove and an oversized island, the kitchen is open to the great room and breakfast nook, so Jenny can watch the kids or talk with company while she's cooking. Guests often spread out from the open great room and kitchen, and head to the outdoor kitchen and patio area, or into the nearby dining room. In winter, the family keeps a rolling cart stocked with the makings for s'mores.



The clean-lined master bedroom has beams and an adjacent sitting area. The master bath's contemporary tub is a favorite spot for the boys' baths.

This is the McCuistons' third holiday in the house. Their decorating focuses on natural elements that fit the home's fresh, farmhouse feel. The family heads out to a Christmas tree farm to cut their trees, and they enjoy hosting a variety of events, including alternating Christmas parties each year — one year for adults, the other for kids. The parties have become part of the spirit and patina of the house, says Jenny, pointing out some heel marks left in the wide-plank reclaimed wood floors from a dance party.

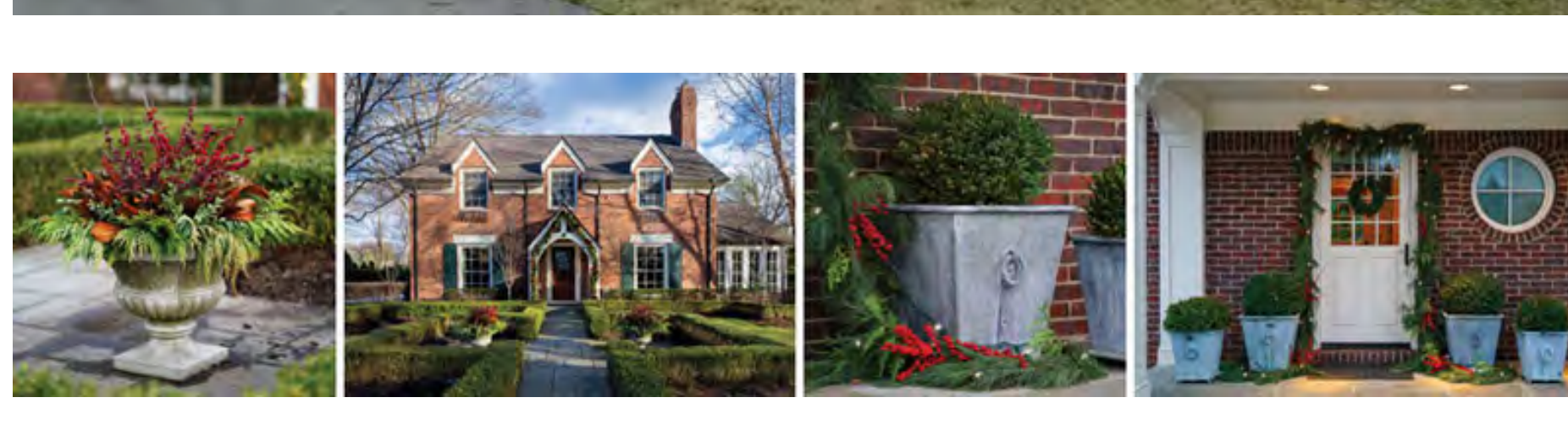
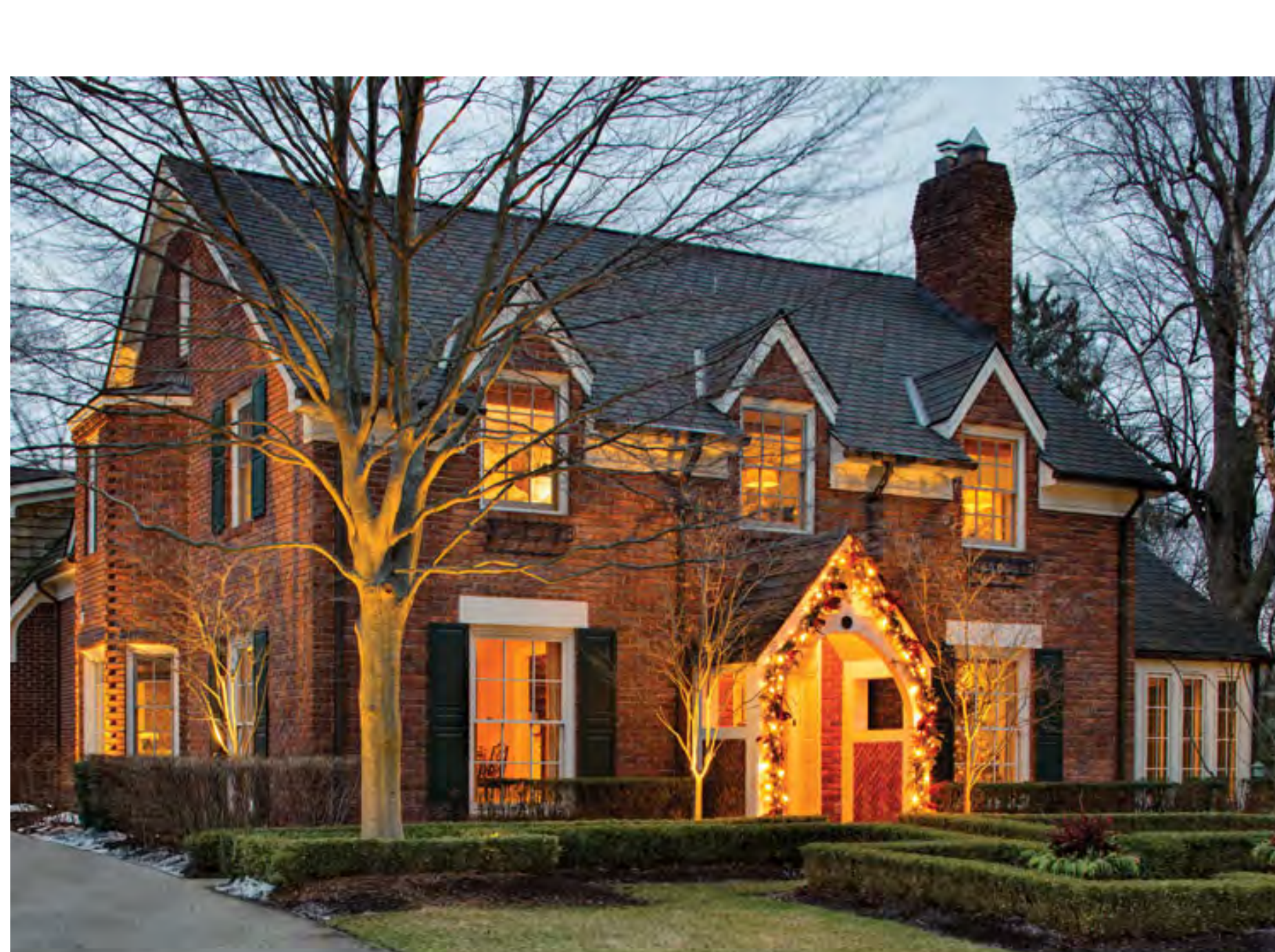
Seasonal decorating, done with a little help from Royal Oak's Moditional Designs, makes the season bright and gives the house a festive air. Adults, kids, partygoers, and guests who stop by during the season can count on lots of good cheer — and, of course, plenty of Christmas music.

Featured Homes

## Night Lights

### Traditions Au Naturel

The Witmer-Hirsch home makes holiday visitors feel as though they're in the English countryside



**BACKSTORY:** Interior designer Lynn Witmer and her husband, David Hirsch, purchased their Bloomfield Hills home (constructed in the 1930s) 10 years ago. "What drew us to it was its English country manor feel," says Witmer, owner of Bloomfield Hills-based Witmer Design, "and we particularly loved the pointed wooden structure that surrounds the front door." When it comes to the holiday season, Witmer likes to decorate with natural elements. "We like to do something a little different each year, but always use all-natural materials and have a garland on the arch by the front door. And we always integrate the arch materials with the urn materials," Witmer says.

**BERRY NICE:** Witmer opts to use a very long garland to adorn the wooden structure around her front door. It's comprised of fresh pine mixed with boxwood, cyprus, magnolia leaves, and lots of ilex (winter red berries that are part of the holly family).

**SHE'S URNED IT:** On each side of Witmer's bluestone front walk, two large, pale gray concrete urns sit inside the boxwood hedges. To echo the materials in the front door's garland, each urn brims with pine, boxwood, and ilex.

**SANTA'S DOOR:** On the north side of the home, four iron urns filled with boxwood topiaries adorn either side of a white wooden door. "We've always called this the 'Santa door,'" Witmer says. "The décor here is more whimsical than it is in front of the house."

**NO. 1 ELF:** All of the home's holiday décor was designed and installed by Rebecca Beausoleil of Moditional Designs of Royal Oak.

**HELLO, HALO!:** Once inside the home, guests immediately see a pair of plaster angels in the foyer (not shown), each one 5 feet high and holding a ceramic shell for holy water. "They came from a church in Europe and David gave them to me as a gift right after the birth of our second daughter 12 years ago. They represent my two girls," Witmer says. "We decorate them appropriately for each season. At Christmas they wear Santa hats, and on birthdays they hold balloons."

**INSIDE INFO:** Lynn and David's two daughters are in charge of decorating the sunroom Christmas tree. A more formal tree, placed in the living room, features natural decorations including feather garlands and pine cones, as well as a mixture of brown, blue, and lime green ball-shaped ornaments. "I don't decorate with traditional red or green inside," Witmer says. "Instead, I like to keep it in context with the interior design of the house."

— By Judith Harris Solomon

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