

# Southern Accents

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AT HOME WITH YOUTHFUL ELEGANCE





# Above It All

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*Even Siller marvels that the 1930s painting (opposite) by Dutch artist Edmond Vandercammen feels at home in the traditional setting of the living room. A banquette (above) adds depth to a space that was once a coat closet, while beveled-mirror panes on the French door to the powder room also provide a feeling of spaciousness.*

When designer Michael Siller stepped into a rather ordinary high-rise overlooking the city's museum district and Rice University campus, he saw beyond the plaster walls, laminate countertops, and beige synthetic carpeting. He saw an opportunity to create a European-style flat that is anything but ordinary.

Starting from scratch, Siller and Larry Hokanson, whose Houston-based firm, Hokanson, Inc., designs and manufactures custom carpeting and rugs, wanted to bring together traditional old-world elegance in a formal but comfortable setting.

The result is a residence with interiors as spectacular as the view. The blend of English, French, and Italian

antiques, contemporary art, rich reds, and subtle details reflects Siller's style, which has made him one of the most sought-after designers in town—especially since his redesign last year of the venerable Tony's, a hot Houston restaurant and gathering spot.

Yet the 36-year-old designer is remarkably down-to-earth, despite having gotten his start with what was



*Siller, who uses only custom lampshades, was thrilled to find an antique Fortuny fabric for the shade on a Venetian urn lamp in the master bedroom (above and opposite). "When it's possible, I like to use one fabric throughout a room," he says. He chose a similar Italian damask for the bed and its enclosed swing-arm lamps.*

formerly Billy W. Francis Design Decoration (now Francis-Russell Design Decoration of New York), where clients in the early '80s rarely worried about cost.

In 1987, Siller left Billy Francis' firm to open a small wallpaper and fabric retail shop in Houston's tony River Oaks section. He quickly built a customer base, and the enterprise evolved into Michael J. Siller Interiors.

"Today, I think everyone has a budget, even my very wealthy clients," Siller says. "I pride myself in giving my clients the best look for the best price."

Though he believes listening to the client's ideas is paramount, Siller clearly has developed preferences. He's fond of mixing different finishes, from rich woods to painted and lacquered pieces, and he likes to add architectural interest to a room.

Before furnishing their high-rise four years ago, Siller and Hokanson added classical columns to better define the living and dining rooms. They also replaced the beige wall-to-wall carpeting with Philippine mahogany to showcase Hokanson's rug designs. Then they collected pieces to shape the apartment's personality.

Among Siller's favorites is a large English urn from the late 1800s that sits in a corner of the dining room. In the living room, he points to an Italian bench he had covered with a Napoléon III tapestry. Recently, they found a late 1700s desk that looks quite at home in the living room.

"I think a house constantly evolves," Siller says. "All the basics can be there, but as you find exciting art and accessories, you add to a room's personality. Part of the fun is in the collecting and pulling it all together." ♦

*For details, see Sourcebook.*

