



In the living room of designer Catherine Olasky's Houston home, her three-year-old daughter, Louisa, helps trim the Fraser fir. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Magnolia wreaths from Weston Farms add holiday spirit to the front doors, which are painted in Benjamin Moore's Texas Leather.



BRITISH ACCENT

Catherine Olasky, half of the design duo Olasky & Sinsteden, brings a bit of jolly old England to her family's Texas home—and to their Southern holiday traditions.

Interior Design **CATHERINE OLASKY**
Interview **KATHLEEN RENDA**
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KATHLEEN RENDA: You're an Anglophile as well as a native Texan. Which was the bigger influence in decorating your Houston home—England or the Lone Star State?

CATHERINE OLASKY: I don't think one style came out on top! The architecture is certainly very Texan. The house was built in the 1970s by Lucian Hood, a local architect who really understood how hot this city can get. He designed it without any windows on the facade, except around the front doors, so the brutal morning sun doesn't bake the front rooms early in the day. There are terrazzo tiles throughout the house, which stay cool even in summer. The decorating—especially the many fabrics and the emphasis on comfort—does skew English. So does the house's eclectic, collected-over-time look. But then again, that approach also nods to Texas. With our six-flags history, there's always been a fusing of styles here, from French to Spanish. In Texas, more is more. Note the two hutches in the dining room that I loaded up with green pottery—if you're going to have one, why not have 50?

The rooms manage to be cozy yet refined. How did you find that balance?

When I decorate, I make sure that every piece in every room is intentional. Before something comes into the house, I ask, Is it special? Do I love both the shape and the fabric? Restraint also plays a part, since I have always had an aversion to clutter. I had the living room's ottoman finished in a 10-inch bullion fringe. It's very decorative, but that is where I stopped in terms of trim in the room. One grand gesture was enough intrigue for the space.

Did Max Sinsteden, your design partner and fellow HB Next Waver, weigh in?

He didn't need to—our styles are in sync 98 percent of the time. The other 2 percent is where we diverge: Max swings ultratraditional where I go whimsical. Which explains the swishy wooden-bead trim on the curtains in my daughter's bedroom and the DIY artwork above the living room sofa—I cut up pages of a Lulu de Kwiatkowski book and used them to make a collage. Of course, Max

RIGHT: Olasky bought the living room's Crate & Barrel sleeper sofa when she worked in Manhattan. After Christmas, ornaments are stored in the camphorwood chest. Skirted chair (at left) in a Jasper fabric. Mirror, J.Pocker. Sconces, Urban Archaeology.

“WE TRIM THE TREE WITH MURANO GLASS AND ORNAMENTS I COLLECT ON MY TRIPS.”



is aware of all my design purchases because we usually shop as a team.

Do you have any favorite places to shop?
We both love to go to antiques fairs in England and France. We're fans of polished walnut and mahogany from the height of the British Empire. People shy away from brown wood because it can be sort of "Sadie old lady." But combine it with up-to-date furnishings, contemporary art, and adventurous colors, and you can get a fresh, one-of-a-kind mix. That's the hallmark of our style.

How much did you sweat the small stuff?
I fixated on the tiniest details, as I tend to do on all of our projects. I am constantly asking myself things like, Should I change the color of the lamp cord? How can this quilt be piped or that sofa be welted? It's about being thoughtful as opposed to obsessive!

Where does this laser focus on finesse come from?
It's just who I am, but some of it was instilled during the seven years I lived in London. The British approach to design is methodical and meticulous. I learned so much from Roger Jones, the head of Colefax and Fowler's antiques department, where I worked for four years. Roger really emphasized to me the importance of details.

Are your holiday celebrations as much of a cultural mashup as your home?

In some ways, yes. In our house, Father Christmas has a Texas twang. Magnolia wreaths and garlands always make an appearance, and for Christmas Eve dinner there are cheese grits, ham, biscuits, and milk punch alongside the polished silver and my grandmother's china. On Christmas Day, my daughter will wear an heirloom dress with English Mary Janes. I'll bake British mince pies and make Christmas crackers, those pull-and-pop favors filled with little toys and paper crowns. But the most important tradition I brought home from London is the notion of slowing down and stepping away from the hustle and the rush. I love sitting around the fireplace and watching the flames as well as taking evening strolls around the neighborhood to admire the holiday decorations and lights. The aim is to savor the quiet moments with family—even if here in Texas, we sometimes have to turn on the air conditioner before we light the fire!



ABOVE: Oberto Gili's *Mixed Flowers* is teamed in the entry with a Bunny Williams Home console. **LEFT:** Pillows in a lively Clarence House pattern and a Design Within Reach tabletop mobile lighten the library's mood. Sconces, Vaughan. Lamp, Christopher Spitzmiller. **OPPOSITE:** The dining room curtains are in Nymphs linen by Thomas O'Brien for Lee Jofa—"one of my all-time-favorite prints," Olasky says. South African Wonki Ware pottery is displayed in one of two hutches original to the home. Chandelier, Jonathan Adler.



At nine feet tall, a four-poster bed from Hollywood at Home anchors the master bedroom. The 1920s glider, covered in a Chelsea Textiles fabric, belonged to Olasky's grandmother. Arthur carpet, Patterson Flynn Martin. **OPPOSITE:** A vintage sofa in a stripe and pair of pillows in Wisteria, both by Chelsea Textiles, harmonize with pillows in a Schumacher floral. The salon-style grouping of antique and modern art includes a landscape purchased at the Round Top Antiques Fair in Texas. Walls in Benjamin Moore's Antique White.





THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Catherine Olasky. Her daughter's bedroom walls are in a Waterhouse Wallhangings print; the doors and trim are painted in Benjamin Moore's Black Bean Soup and Caldwell Green. Antique sleigh beds in the guest room are upholstered in a Colefax and Fowler fabric; pillows in Christopher Farr Cloth's Carnival; bed linens, Garnet Hill; walls, Benjamin Moore's Antique Jade. **OPPOSITE:** An Oeuf toddler bed is topped with a comforter in a Schumacher fabric. FOR MORE DETAILS, SEE RESOURCES

