



COME ON IN

# “I knew I wanted an old home...”

Designer Ellen Godfrey updates a 1928 Birmingham bungalow with her cool California style

BY GRACE HAYNES | PHOTOGRAPHS BY HECTOR MANUEL SANCHEZ

## “WE THOUGHT THERE

was no way we would ever move back to Birmingham,” says interior designer Ellen Godfrey, who’d been living in Los Angeles for more than eight years with her husband, Matt. Instead of returning to their hometown, they were looking for bigger Southern cities to put down roots with their daughter, Irene. A Birmingham friend convinced the Godfreys to tour a 1928 Craftsman-style house in his Crestwood neighborhood, and the

### PERSONAL DESIGN

“I would call my look ‘new traditional.’ I appreciate classic architecture but like to add in modern pieces,” says Ellen.



**Breakfast Nook** A marble-topped tulip table balances the traditional cabinets. A painting by Ellen’s father hangs above.



STYLING: LYDIA PURSELL



**Clockwise from above:** The living room's original windows and glass cabinets add historic charm, while green leather chairs offer a modern touch. In the dining room, a large pleated shade from Rejuvenation and a rug Ellen got for a steal in California help fill the large space. Dark furnishings stand out against the white walls.

couple was sold on the welcoming, close-knit community. Ellen wanted to be hands-on with her first home. “We had lived in rentals in LA, and being an interior designer, I had wished I could rip out a kitchen or make an update but couldn’t,” she says. “I knew I wanted an old home, definitely a fixer-upper. I was looking for the kind of place that needed more aesthetic renovations than structural.” The Godfreys balanced savvy splurges with plenty of smart saves to transform their 1,500-square-foot bungalow into a cozy spot ideal for entertaining.

### Open House

“We removed the screens that previously closed in the porch. Now, it’s another hangout space. We hung string lights and like to sit on the front sill for dinner most evenings. It’s easy to pull around the Adirondack chairs when friends drop by for cocktails.”

### Location Matters

“The living spaces were created just over 90 years ago, so the original layout is not very conducive to a modern lifestyle. There’s also not an official entry area, but there is a natural hallway that helps bring you into the house. Positioning

furniture to one side of the hallway separates the living room (pictured above), so you don’t walk directly into that space.”

### Fit for a Crowd

“Comfortably seating a lot of people when we entertain was one of my top priorities. The dining room’s round table and the living room’s long bench-cushion sofas from Interior Define (plus a pair of wing chairs) do the trick without anyone feeling cramped. Nothing is too precious in our home, and I want guests to feel like they can put their feet up on the sofa, not worry about using coasters, and relax.”

### Sentimental Statement

“I designed the dining room around a painting by my dad of my grandmother’s patio in Guatemala (shown above left). It’s one of the first things you see when walking in the house, so I knew I wanted to hang it on that wall.”

### Smart Storage

“There are only two closets in the house—and one of them is 2 feet wide. Any furniture with doors or drawers really works for us, like the dining room’s antique black console and a glass hutch that belonged to my husband’s great-grandmother.”



Ellen's  
Paint  
Picks

EXTERIOR

Sherwin-Williams  
Black Magic (SW 6991)

LIVING ROOM AND  
DINING ROOM

Benjamin Moore  
Classic Gray (1548)

PLAYROOM

Benjamin Moore  
Simply White (OC-117)

KITCHEN CABINETS

Dunn-Edwards Black  
Spruce (DE6308)

**Embrace Setbacks**

“My original idea to extend the cabinetry on both sides of the galley-style kitchen wasn't in the budget. Instead I installed a window seat with two huge drawers underneath (where I stash wrapping paper, ribbons, and my daughter's toys). I'm glad we had that limitation, because we use the breakfast nook all the time.”

**Balancing Act**

“Some of the biggest changes happened in the kitchen. We tore down a wall, refinished the floors, and added floor-to-ceiling Shaker cabinetry that's painted a rich dark green. Honed black granite countertops resemble soapstone but are more durable and less expensive. I balanced splurges with an affordable tile choice for the backsplash and a farmhouse sink from The Home Depot.

A favorite find was the unlacquered gold faucet I scored in LA at an Emily Henderson warehouse sale before we moved here.”

**Creative Solutions**

“Our daughter's playroom also functions as our guest

room. The sofa pulls out into a queen-size bed, and the French doors close for privacy. The walls were originally dark brown, so we installed board-and-batten siding with a bold persimmon Rifle Paper Co. wallpaper above it.” **SL**

**EASY UPDATES**

Keep the old-house character with original millwork, windows, and flooring. Freshen up spaces by repainting and replacing lighting.



**Curb Appeal** “Most of my clients ask for bright white and prefer clean shades, but I wanted a dark, moody color story for my own home,” says Ellen, who swathed the brick exterior in black.