

# BELLA VITA

A new Palladian-style residence  
is personalized down to the last  
detail for a Dallas family.

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**Architecture:** Clay Nelson, C A Nelson Architecture Group LLC  
**Interior Design:** Suzy Childress, Childress Interiors, Inc.  
**Home Builder:** Austin Nixon, Nixon Custom Homes





What could be better than building a marvelous new house?” posits architect Clay Nelson. “A remodel is about what you can do—but a new

build is all about what you *want* to do.” In the case of this Dallas residence, the clients desired a classically inspired Italian villa, but around a familiar center-hall plan. They also envisioned architectural surprises throughout designed to celebrate the family’s interests, including everything from Legos to fine wine. With Nelson, interior designer Suzy Childress and builder Austin Nixon at the helm, the owners’ wants and needs were satisfied in spades.

“You don’t get to invent traditional architecture,” Nelson continues. “If you’re going down that road, follow the mathematical guides and let it be what it wants to be.” Tapping into his extensive visual library, he did just that, working closely with project manager Joseph Bentley to develop a plan based on Italian architect Andrea Palladio’s 16<sup>th</sup>-century villas. The resulting pedimented, symmetrical façade features the requisite pilasters and archways. However, rather than place the central staircase in the entry, he made the stairs axial to a dramatic two-story rotunda. That volume allows daylight to filter softly down through the interiors, while hidden doors in its paneling reveal copious closets. “Everything we do is dictated by logic,” Nelson adds. “We even applied formulas like the Fibonacci spiral and golden section to confirm the classical proportions of the front elevation.”

Building on the meticulous bones of the house, Childress set her sights on fine-tuning the interior finishes. These include custom cabinetry and ceilings, limestone floors quarried in Morocco and wood beams reclaimed from a 19<sup>th</sup>-century barn on a farm in Ohio. “I interpreted the clients’ many wonderful ideas to create a personalized home,” recalls Childress. “The result is an eclectic interior that has elements of nature in almost every room but doesn’t follow a particular vernacular. It’s a collection of their desires.”

Foremost on the homeowners’ minds was creating a family home factoring in children and a menagerie of pets with design catered to everyone’s needs. You’ll find formal living spaces, of course—an elegant living room with a player piano that enlivens parties and a dining room set aglow at night beneath a metallic plaster ceiling—but the main living area forms the hub of the house. Adjoining the kitchen, which has a secondary prep space with a living herb wall, is a multifunctional room anchored by a pair of high and low tables in petrified wood with custom bases. “They can be used for anything—from crossword puzzles to drinks and dining—and are more interesting visually,” describes Childress. A breakfast nook brings the whole crew together, and a large family room leads to an outdoor space designed for year-round use.

But it’s the family member-specific spaces where Childress and her project manager, Kendra Ausley, went to town. The husband’s study features a secret door leading to a humidior, while downstairs is a craft area for the wife. For the dogs, Childress designed a room with built-in crates and their own special dog bath, wallpapering the space with a playful pooch print. She also incorporated retractable dog gates throughout the residence to help keep them out of trouble. Upstairs are not just the family’s bedrooms, but also a Narnia-inspired library for the kids accessible through a carved-wood wardrobe-like door. “It was originally going to be a mechanical closet, but they needed a place for all their books,” says the designer. “Now it holds them floor-to-ceiling and makes a great little hideout!” For the animal-themed media room just down the hall, she even gave the pet reptiles a glass home with a snakeskin-pattern tile backsplash built into custom cabinetry. And for the couple’s bedroom suite, she repurposed an existing sofa into a comfortable seating area all their own.

From the beginning, and probably not unlike Palladio with his own patrons, the design team took the clients’ words to heart. “They wanted the home to be geared toward them, personalized, and we did that in every square inch,” says Childress. “Family is the center of their universe and the design had to—and does—reflect that love. There’s something for everyone.” 🏡



An arched family room niche houses an eclectic vignette. Here, stone carved heads from Easter Island rest on a custom console in front of an oil painting affixed to a fretwork panel, all from Brendan Bass.



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—SUZY CHILDRESS



Living room armchairs from The Bright Group in Kravet velvet join a bench from Culp Associates in faux leopard from Romo. A mantel from Pittet Architecturals aligns with a Fredrick Ramond chandelier from Meletio Lighting. The floor covering is from Truett Fine Carpets & Rugs.





**Right:** In the breakfast area, a custom zinc-topped table and vintage leather chairs are from Brendan Bass. A Perennials outdoor tweed covers the banquette cushion. The chandelier is Arteriors.

**Opposite:** Apparatus' pendant illuminates Palecek stools and Taj Mahal quartzite kitchen counters from Texas Counter Fitters fabricated by Il Granito. Ann Sacks tile edges a custom hand-carved Moroccan limestone hood from Pittet Architecturals.







**Above:** Sunrise Wood Designs fabricated a design by Childress Interiors, Inc. for the living room's custom cabinetry. A brass-wire grille and quartz crystal-and-brass hardware make the woodwork sing.

**Left:** The dining room table pairs with Lee Industries chairs from Brendan Bass in Kravet fabric and Edelman Leather backs. Terra Pura applied troweled crushed limestone to the walls; the recessed ceiling features a metallic finish complementing the Serip chandelier from Allan Knight.





**Above:** Walker Zanger flooring sets an elegant tone in the main bathroom below a Niermann Weeks for Visual Comfort chandelier. The John-Richard églomisé bench is from McGannon Showrooms.

**Opposite:** The main bedroom includes a Thibaut grass cloth headboard wall, Peacock Alley bedding and bench from David W. Gilbert & Associates. Palecek floor lamps from McGannon Showrooms and Kravet draperies flank Fabricut hand-painted pillows. The reclaimed wood floors are from Pittet Architecturals.