

Story by Susan Victor

Interior Design by Sue Shannon,
Principal Designer Nandina Home & Design

Architecture by Jeffrey Burden of Truong,
Montgomery and Burden/Architecture
and Design

Builder: Steve Kisner, Kisner Construction



COMING HOME

Designer Sue Shannon Shares
the Trials, Tribulations, and Triumphs
of Building Her “Final” Home



The idea of “home” can trigger many emotions, both good and bad. But if fortune smiles upon you, that structure can become sacred to you. Then, no matter what exotic destination beckons you to visit, the moment you return and open the door to your home and walk into that space, it envelops you with comfort, peace and solitude. At that moment you realize the priceless value of “home.”

At Nandina we have the privilege and honor of helping to create homes every day. Understanding just how personal and emotional that process can be for our clients usually becomes much more real when we find ourselves walking in their shoes! As designers we are exposed to many beautiful spaces that stretch the limits of creativity. We fantasize about building or renovating the perfect home for ourselves and our families. When the opportunity and the funds finally do come to fruition, the reality is that the actual process mirrors all of the angst, agonizing over selections, managing details, and organizing orders that we handle every day with our clients. Only this time we are our clients! And often, own expectations are more difficult to manage than those of our clients!

When my Nandina business partner Sue Shannon and her husband Tim decided to build their new home, Sue often said, “This is it! My next home is an assisted living facility!” We were in the throes of building our business and Tim was working long hours as a busy surgeon in a large orthopedic medical practice. When I sat down with Sue to interview her about the interiors of her home for this feature, we were both flooded with memories of how eye-opening that experience was eight years ago.



Susan Victor (SV): As a busy person building a design business, how did you make the leap to take on building a new home?

Sue Shannon (SS): Well, no one ever realizes just how much time and energy it takes to build a custom home. We had built two other homes before, and I think I just assumed it would be easy and a new challenge. I spent a lot of late nights poring over magazines and finish samples. I didn’t want my personal project to take away from my commitment to clients during the workday. One night around midnight, I remember being in tears as I counted and re-counted every cabinet door and drawer in the entire house so I could finalize the hardware order. Honestly, I felt like I didn’t have a day off for the 18 months it took to build our home.

SV: How did you begin the creative process? Did you have a plan and then find the property, or the other way around? What came first, the chicken or the egg?

SS: The “property egg” definitely came first! It is shaped like a piece of pie with a tail, and there were utility lines running through it that couldn’t be crossed. Because it’s in the historic district and has large setbacks from the golf course, the actual buildable space on the lot was quite limited. I knew that building on this property was going to be a challenge, but the location checked all the boxes for Tim and me. It was in town, which made it closer to our store for me and closer to the hospital for Tim, but most of all it was one of only a handful of properties available on the historic city golf course – a major plus for Tim!

Before we ever purchased our quirky plot of land, we hired Jeff Burden as our architect to make sure we could actually build a livable house on it. Jeff got right to work scribbling on a napkin to show us just how the house could nestle into the hillside and give us that downtown home on a golf course that we were looking for. Jeff has a focus on historical design. We felt strongly that we wanted the exterior of the home to reflect the historic neighborhood in which it sits. He had been recommended by friends, and after meeting him I felt he was the perfect collaborator for me to make our vision become a reality. We asked Jeff to design the exterior so that it would fit into our very old, historic neighborhood. We gave him free rein on the style and trusted his judgment. He jumped off existing larger homes in the neighborhood and used some elements from them to make the house feel and appear as if it had been here a long time. Jeff likens the house, built on this property, to Marilyn Monroe squeezed into her red dress, bursting at the seams!



SV: What were the most critical and difficult design decisions you had to make during the process?

SS: The Lot shape was tricky. We ended up needing to purchase an additional slice of land to make the front fit comfortably on the street. The slope of the lot dictated that the house would be a two-story with a walkout lower level. We ended up with a larger space than originally intended because of this. On the interior, the ceiling millwork was selected as the house was being built. We decided on many of the designs once the house was framed and its character began to take shape. The choices that we made at this point are some of my favorites. The “doughnut hole” into the great room with the natural plank ceilings, the high/low ceiling in the study, and the Hitchcock ceiling in our bedroom are unique characteristics that I appreciate every day. Jeff suggested using old wood for our hardwood floors throughout. He linked us up with David Howard, a master furniture and flooring craftsman from Tennessee, who can make magic happen with wood that originally looks beyond repair. We trusted him as he traveled to Pennsylvania and took down most of an old barn to harvest the wood we used throughout the house. He did an incredible job with finishing and added some special design elements that instantly helped to give this new-build some age and character.



SV: I remember how we agonized over the wash that was used on the great room ceiling! I think we asked the painter to sample that stain four or five times.

SS: Poor Robert the painter! He was so patient! He still talks about watered-down paint dripping down on their heads as they worked. I remember you and I wanted that perfect khaki color that wouldn't throw pink and still allow the wood grain to show through. What a challenge! But thankfully, we finally nailed it.



SV: Describe how you live in the house. After this much time, what decisions still ring true for your lifestyle? What would you change?

SS: Our overall goal was to design a home for our new life as empty nesters and have comfortable space on one-level to live in and entertain friends and family. We wanted create a setting where we could age in place. My husband, Tim, loves to cook, but wanted a prep/cooking area where two cooks could work and guests could be a part of the process. He stayed out of the way on most selections, but had a strong voice when it came to flow and function throughout the main level. He was right, and I'm glad I listened to his wise counsel. We ended up with a large lower level, which houses our

adult children when they are in town, but also gained a space that's great for storage. We especially love our covered upstairs porch and outdoor fireplace. They are equally as comfortable for two as they are when set up for a large gathering.

SV: What was your design inspiration for the palette and style of the interiors?

SS: I was much more concerned about the interiors, not surprisingly. I love a clean, uncluttered, transitional space, but felt strongly that the surfaces in this home should reflect the aesthetic and time period of the neighborhood. While at High Point Furniture Market, before we'd ever broken ground, I found a beautiful Oushak rug that I loved. It later became the starting point for our whole design.

As time has passed, the interiors have changed and become more layered, just as our lives and interests have evolved as empty nesters.

SV: I remember the day you found that rug! It was a beautiful jumping off point for the warm palette that runs throughout the main floor of the house.



How would you define your design team and what it meant for you to have a collaborative effort as you went through the build/design process?

SS: Often the hardest project designers will do is one for their own family! I was fortunate to have a strong team to fall back on when doubts crept in. Susan, you were definitely my sounding board, and also my partner in crime! We were used to collaborating on projects and we know each other's strengths and weaknesses. A lot of the times when I felt stymied on a specific design dilemma, you helped me gain clarity and remain sane. Jeff was there too, with a trained, experienced eye. Lastly, the Kisner construction crew was a class act and very easy to work with. You could count on them to keep things running smoothly and on schedule.

SV: What would you do differently?

SS: Not a lot, I'm happy to say! A larger window in the great room to bring in more light, a couple of pocket doors that could ease the



flow in a tight bathroom downstairs and an inch or two more clearance on the garage doors ...

SV: I often tease you about how you can't go more than six months without tweaking something in your design – new drapes or pillows, or sometimes a whole new look for a guest room.

What's up next for this house?

SS: We've been here for eight years and the time has flown by. I change something every year. It's hard not to when you are exposed to some of the greatest designers around through our travels to markets and networking events. I've only recently overhauled two guest bedrooms to fit the needs of our growing and changing family. Next up? Maybe nothing, but there is a spark of an idea starting to ignite in Jeff's brain and mine that might include a cute little guest house and maybe a bunk room. It would give us that ONE extra room that we sometimes need, especially if there might be some little grandchildren in the future. One can always hope that if you build it, they will come ... home.