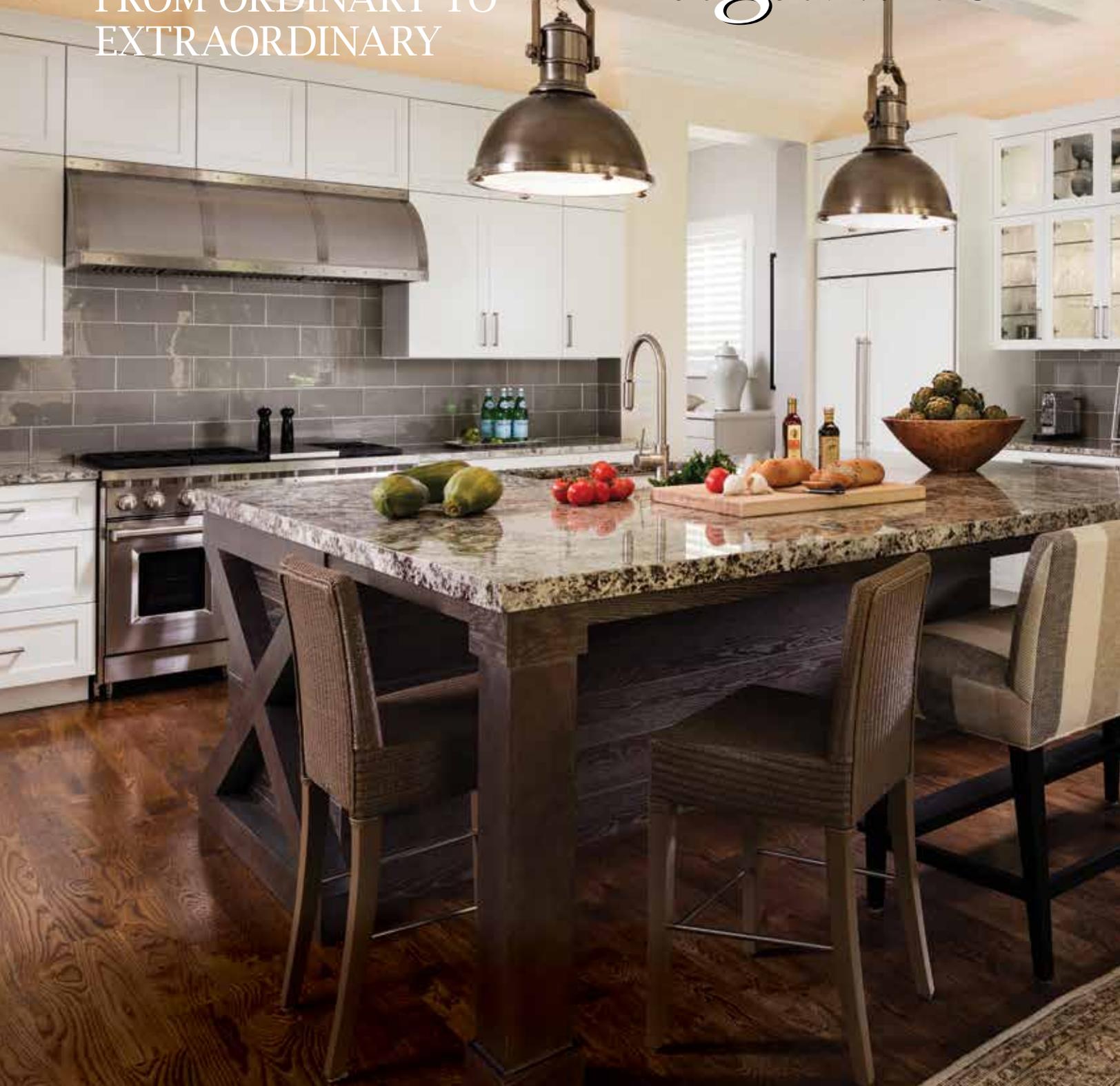


THE FIRST ✿ THE ONLY

# Vero Beach *Magazine*®

FROM ORDINARY TO  
EXTRAORDINARY





Soft earth tones, texture, pattern and a coffered ceiling transformed what once was the relatively nondescript living room. Sheer linen draperies, woven shades made of sustainable natural fibers and paintings by contemporary American artist John Schuyler create additional interest.

# From Ordinary To Extraordinary

LISA DEFRANCES USES ARCHITECTURAL ENHANCEMENTS, TEXTURAL TOUCHES AND AN INSPIRED PALETTE TO TRANSFORM A BEACHSIDE RESIDENCE

WRITTEN BY ANN TAYLOR | PHOTOGRAPHY BY KIM SARGENT

Lisa DeFrances can't help but smile as images of a recent residential redo scroll across her iPad screen. "Timeless" best describes the custom look she and her design team created. "Gracious," "serene" and "comfortable" also fit. Yet those adjectives definitely didn't apply to what the award-winning interior designer saw when she first stepped inside the beachside residence.

"The house itself was impressive. It had good lines, scale and proportion, but it wasn't detailed. I felt there were areas that had great potential to be enhanced, things I would want to have changed," says DeFrances, recalling impressions during her initial walk-through. High on the change list were the dining room, kitchen and foyer. Once they were redefined, she felt confident other problem areas would follow suit.

A couple from New Jersey had purchased the house in order to spend more time in Vero Beach where they have family. The location, inside a private barrier island community, was perfect. What wasn't perfect was the lack of distinctive features throughout the two-story residence. Plain vanilla versus vanilla bean espresso. Enlisting the expertise of an interior designer before moving in became a priority.

The search was on and a tour of the Internet led to a link to the *Vero Beach Magazine* website. There, on the cover of a recent issue was a photograph of a living room awash with monochromatic hues, textural touches and architectural details. It was the look the couple envisioned for their Florida home. The interior designer was Lisa DeFrances. It was meant to be.

"The owners came to me and said they needed to have the house furnished and stylized, and they wanted it to be different from their residence up north, which they described as Country French," says DeFrances, recalling early getting-to-know-you conversations. "They weren't thinking about a major renovation, as they'd just gone through an unplanned one after Hurricane Sandy, but they began to see the potential of their home through our vision and became open to make the architectural changes we were recommending."

With that in mind, DeFrances and her design assistants



Paneled walls in the dining room create a classic backdrop for the contemporary, cerused oak-top round table and companion chairs. Iron and glass wall sconces light the perimeter and add sculptural interest.

Janice Bruton and Jen Zegel got to work, focusing in on what they considered to be the most challenging area: the dining room. A small, square interior space without windows and two doors opening to a hallway, it was basically a closed-in box.

Because the family likes to entertain, DeFrances thought

it was important to identify what could be done to make the room interesting, warm and inviting so people would feel comfortable there, enjoying a meal, conversing and lingering over dessert and coffee. She has found that spending time alone in a house, contemplating problem areas, pondering the potential and envisioning ways to reach her goals leads

her to achieve the desired results.

The dining room required a great deal of pondering, and the results are evident in the custom paneling and textured wall covering. Custom cabinetry with two tall cabinets provides a serving area with space for twin lamps and hidden storage of the home's audio equipment. Four iron and glass



In the kitchen a granite-topped island takes center stage, as does the upholstered bench. The addition of architectural moldings, beams and nickel-board to the ceiling creates a presence, as do twin brushed-nickel pendants over the island.

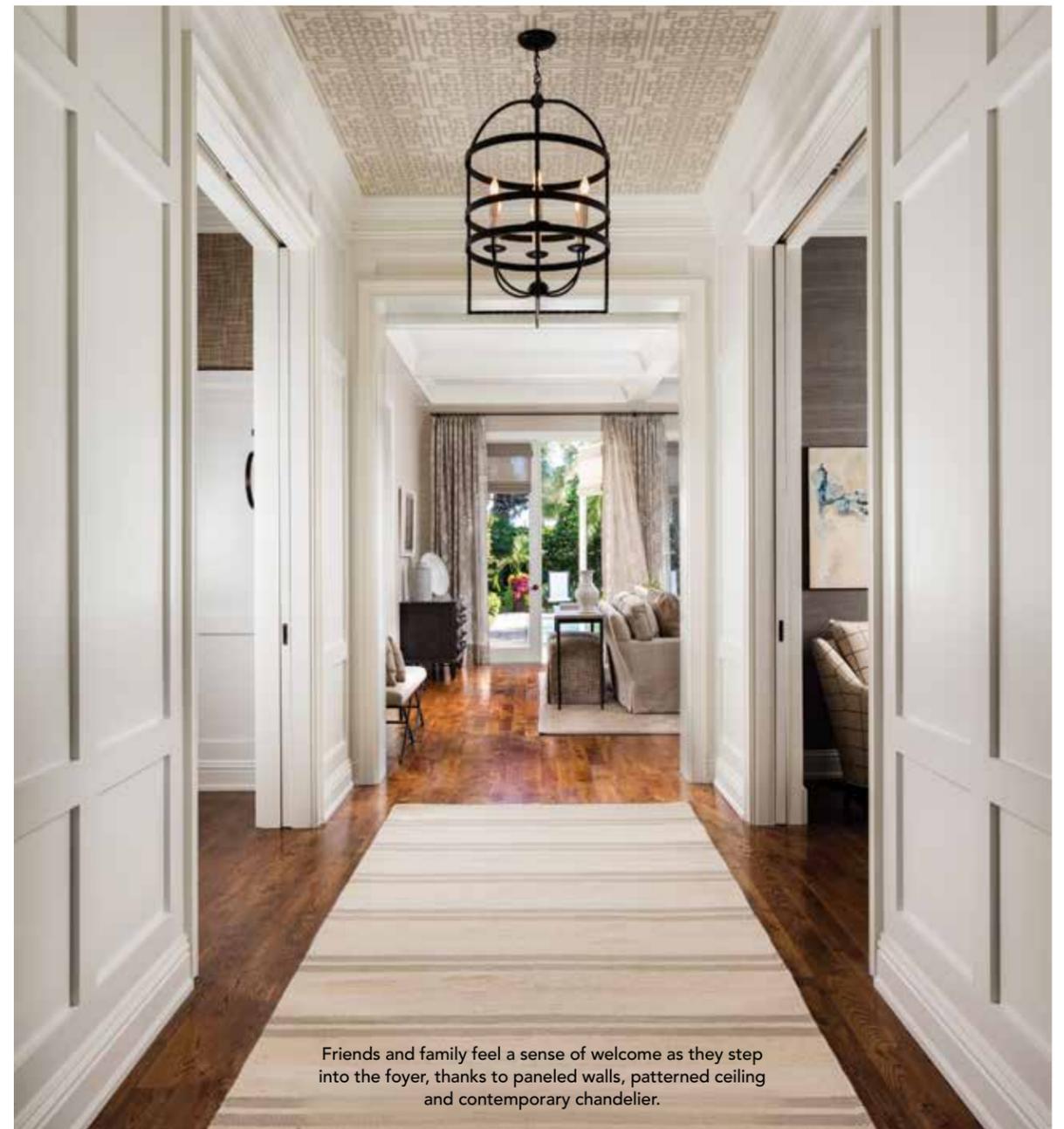
wall sconces light the perimeter of the room and add sculptural interest. “We chose a custom, cerused oak-top, round table that seats eight and meets the couple’s entertaining needs,” says DeFrances, noting that the upholstered benches tucked under the shelf add extra seating. She makes it all sound so simple. It’s not.

The transformation was two years in the making, with the couple involved throughout the duration of the project, giving DeFrances concept pictures of things they liked. The large, open kitchen is a perfect example. Custom cabinetry and appliances would take up only so much space. What to do with the rest of the room, traditionally the place where family and friends tend to gravitate? DeFrances proposed that a large island with stools and an upholstered bench would be the perfect gathering point.

“The island gave us an opportunity to have a prep-and-serving counter as well as providing more storage. The two-person bench was unconventional, but it’s amazing. When [a family member] goes into the kitchen, it’s the first place they head for.” Throughout the



The once plain hallway now has personality-plus, thanks to the addition of a sculptural console table, mirror with bone inlay frame and selected accessories.



Friends and family feel a sense of welcome as they step into the foyer, thanks to paneled walls, patterned ceiling and contemporary chandelier.

house, DeFrances stained the oak floors a warm, umber shade of brown and continued the palette of taupe, neutrals and gray, adding texture and pattern in wall coverings, area rugs and fabrics.

Architectural moldings enhance the cabinetry. Adding beams and nickel-board to the ceiling creates a presence that had been absent. Brushed-nickel pendant lighting over

the island strikes an industrial note. Nearby, a small seating area draws you in like a magnet. Everything looks as though it has always been there. And that was DeFrances’ intent.

Her vision for the foyer and the space beyond was not quite as clear. When describing her initial impression of the entryway, the designer minces no words. “It was an awkward space. There wasn’t a place to land your eye so



In the library, mahogany shelving and cabinetry, textured walls, and a contemporary glass-topped desk set the stage for correspondence or curling up with a good book.

you found yourself looking straight out to the backyard and pool through a room that was like a big hallway that seemed to have no purpose.”

It didn't take long for DeFrances to envision a secondary space as the “interhall.” Crown molding, custom paneling, geometric-patterned wallpaper on the ceiling, and a hand-forged lantern create a sense of arrival and purpose to a formerly “big hallway” with plenty of places for the eye to land and appreciate. These elements also set the

stage for what is to come.

Off the interhall, DeFrances developed the den into a cozy, intimate TV-watching area by adding warmth using textured wallpaper, patterned window shades and a custom, sisal area rug. A sofa, chairs with ottomans and a large-screen TV extend an invitation to sit and stay awhile; and it has become a favorite gathering spot, especially when a football or basketball game is playing.

In the living room, Team DeFrances continued

transforming the ordinary into the extraordinary by adding another architectural detail: a coffered ceiling. The use of a shaded, textured wallpaper complements the soothing earth tones of the upholstery fabric. “I've found people like the quietness and calmness of neutral shades,” says the designer. “You have to use other techniques, like light and texture, to add contrast. Scale is very important, as is creating interest for the eye by using different materials to develop the character of the house.”

**A**t the heart of every project is what it is the owners value most, what they hold dear. “In this case it was family and the importance of having a place close by where they could be together. They love being by the beach, and we chose things that are meaningful to them. We wanted everything in the house to look as though it had been thoughtfully curated. This is their Florida retreat, and the couple and our team chose artwork that speaks to where they are,” says

DeFrances, referring to paintings and photographs seen throughout the house.

One of her favorites is the picture of a turtle hanging in the second-floor mezzanine, another large, undefined space without real purpose other than to serve as a landing at the top of the curved stairway. DeFrances sketched a few ideas and after conferring with the owners, a contemporary, leather day bed, table and eye-catching zebra pattern area rug made their appearance.

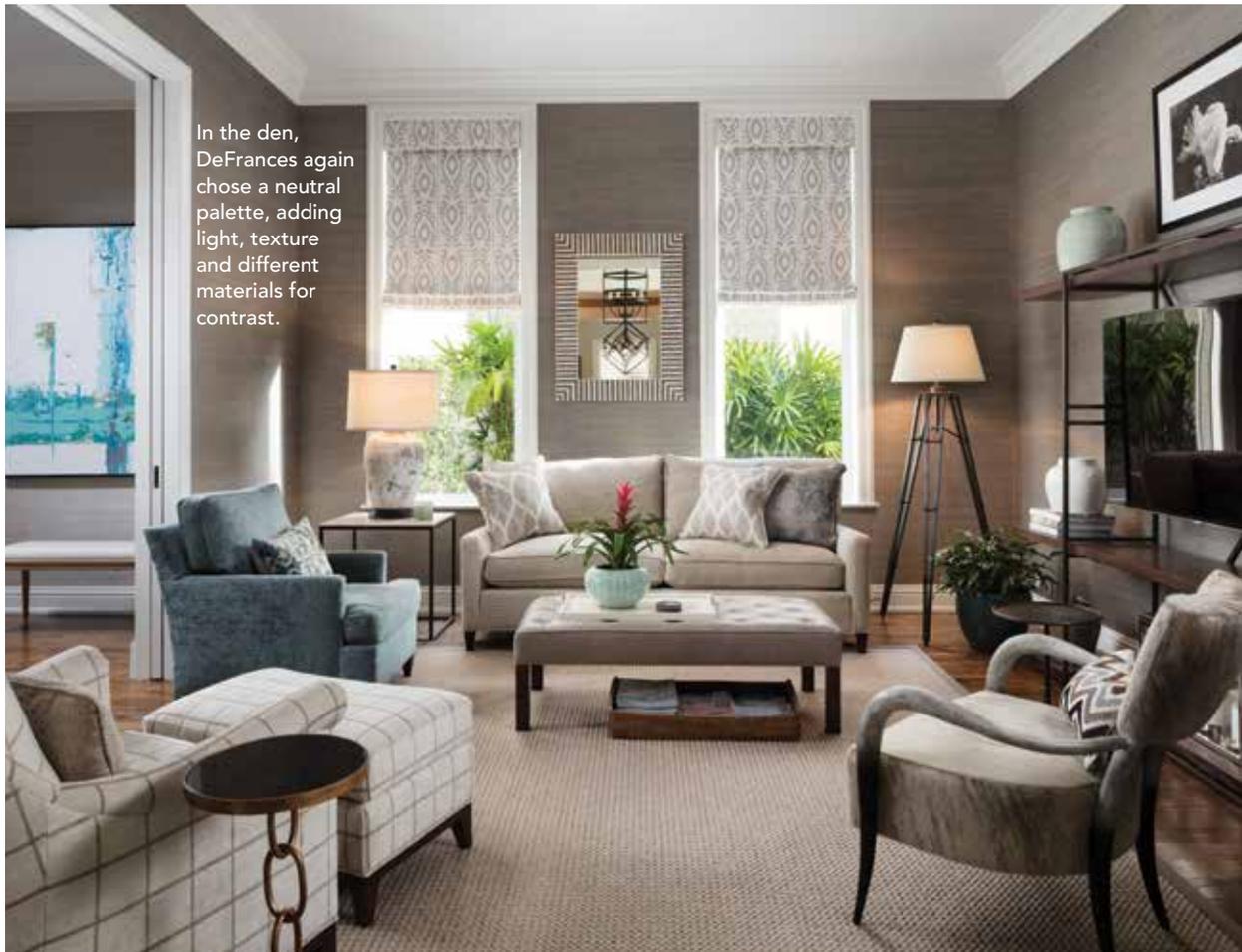
When at last DeFrances and her team were putting final touches on rooms throughout the house and making sure everything was just as they wanted it to be, the owners arrived before the scheduled unveiling time. "It was a mad cap installation and we were almost finished getting everything in place so we could leave before they arrived," DeFrances smiles as she recalls the mini-moment of panic when she saw their car pull up.

"Fortunately I was in the driveway and asked if they could come back in a couple of hours because we wanted

everything to be absolutely perfect. We wanted them to be wowed when they came in the door and saw everything for the first time. They said yes, they'd return later, which was actually very gracious of them as it's their home and they were so excited."

They still are, thanks to the relationship they formed with DeFrances, who appreciates them as much as they do her. "We've been very fortunate to have great clients and projects that are personally satisfying," the designer says enthusiastically, smiling as she takes a final look at the images on her iPad.

"It's really an honor when somebody lets you come into their house, their personal space to create an environment that provides a retreat from the external pressures of the day. In the crazy world we live in, you can have a bad day, there can be family issues you're dealing with, problems at work. Our home is a sacred place; I don't take it for granted the fact that we can help make people's lives better." ❁



In the den, DeFrances again chose a neutral palette, adding light, texture and different materials for contrast.