

THE BULLETIN

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T'S A FAMILY AFFAIR

For gallery owner Chandra Johnson and her husband, NASCAR champion Jimmie Johnson, creating a comfortable home for their two young daughters and busy lives did not mean slouching on style. They're one of the chicest couples in the South, known for their genuine warmth and generous spirit, and they're constantly on the go, but are devoted homebodies at heart. So they needed a space that could reflect and make room for that all. Enter decorator Barrie Benson, the maestra of mix-master style.

WRITTEN BY JULIA REED. PHOTOGRAPHY BY PAUL COSTELLO.

Jimmie and Chandra with their daughters Evie, left, and Lydia in their vintage station wagon.



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hen former model Chandra Johnson wed superstar NASCAR driver Jimmie Johnson just over fourteen years ago, the couple snapped up an almost finished “builder home” in a leafy neighborhood of Charlotte, North Carolina. Chandra had not yet become the serious collector she is today, and the space was decorated for the newlyweds in a matter of months.

About six years in, Chandra, who founded SOCO Gallery, a hub of Charlotte’s burgeoning art scene, and who also runs the Jimmie Johnson Foundation, which focuses on assisting children and schools across the country, began to get a tad restless in the formal and mostly monochromatic house. By then, she and Jimmie had picked up some treasures on their many travels, they’d started a significant art collection and were planning a family.

They’d also established a certain yin-yang groove to their lifestyle: They were regulars on the red-carpet circuits, but also loved to kick back and spin records from their stash of vintage vinyl. They were relaxed and gracious hosts who frequently entertained, but they also cherished their private time. Any renovation would have to accommodate these dualities.

For a redo that played out in three phases over the course of several years, Chandra chose close friend Barrie Benson, an interior designer known for her fresh, deft layering of eras and styles. Benson calls the Philip Johnson-designed Menil house in Houston, in which Dominique de Menil blended fine antiques with remarkable, mostly midcentury furniture and a storied art collection, “my Bible.” Her cosmopolitan Southern sensibility was just right for the task at hand.

Another good friend of the couple, architect Perry Poole, made significant contributions to the project, not least of which was helping to source some of the fabulous midcentury furniture and lighting. (His wife, Laura Vinroot Poole, happens to own Capitol, the ultra-chic women’s store where Chandra procures many of the pieces for her divine wardrobe.)



In the living room, an eclectic array of pieces feels cohesive and serene. French mantel flanked by 19th-century Irish cabinet and leather-wrapped Jacques Adnet chest; vintage light fixture by Serge Mouille; vintage armchairs by Gio Ponti; club chairs by Barrie Benson for Highland House, highlandhousefurniture.com, for upholstery get the look with Short Shag 2643271, Schumacher, fischumacher.com. Art by Joan Mitchell and Hunter S. Thompson.



The living room, with its muted palette of neutrals and pink and glints of metal, has just the right dose of glamour. Vintage sofa by Harvey Propper, for upholstery get the look with Gainsborough Velvet 42774, Schumacher, schumacher.com. Opposite, art clockwise from top left: Henri Matisse, Liz Nielsen, Franz Kline, Line Vautrin mirrors, Terry O'Neill, Raymond Pettibon, Malick Sidibé, Damian Stamer, Brittany Little.



“The couple’s deep appreciation for art is evident throughout the house.”

The painting on the dining room ceiling was commissioned from artist Damian Stamer, who is represented by Chandra’s SOCO Gallery. Vintage Italian chandelier; table lamp by David Netto, davidnettodesign.com. Art on wall by Donald Judd. Opposite: Custom chandelier; for walls get the look with Glossed Vellum 5008460, Schumacher, fschumacher.com. Sculpture by Joel Shapiro.



Chandra and Jimmie have been known to host dinner parties in the intimate library, with candlelight flickering off the highly lacquered walls. Vintage chaise by Jacques Adnet; vintage side table by Edward Wormley; vintage sofa by Edward Wormley, for upholstery, get the look with Otto Velvet **72762** by David Oliver for Schumacher, fshumacher.com; for curtains, get the look with Prestwick Wool Satin **68591**, Schumacher, fshumacher.com. Art by Cy Twombly and Robert Motherwell.



In one daughter's bedroom, floral patterns, scalloped edges, trim details and a pared-down canopy bed combine for a space that feels playful yet refined. For the textured natural wallcovering get the look with Haruki Sisal 5004718, Schumacher, schumacher.com. Art by Elliott Puckette. Opposite, art by Halsey Hathaway.

Anchored by a canopy bed with rich, velvet curtains, the master bedroom is a cossetting retreat. Vintage chandelier by Jean Royère; vintage sofa by Milo Baughman; vintage settee by Finn Juhl; for bed curtains, get the look with Venetian Silk Velvet 70438, Schumacher, schumacher.com.



“Now the house is filled with all the things I love,” says Chandra, “and is a reflection of who we are.”

The redo began with a rather modest expansion of Chandra’s impressive closet in which Barrie installed a pair of exquisite handpainted wall panels. Jimmie, Chandra jokes, was jealous, so he got a new improved space too. “We started rolling from there,” Chandra says.

The next phase included the home’s public spaces. In the living room, a pair of Gio Ponti chairs are parked opposite a long pink velvet sofa, ample seating for the room Chandra says the family hangs in constantly. Above the fireplace is a painting by Joan Mitchell (“I really wanted a strong female artist to be the anchor of that room,” Chandra says), and adjacent hangs a Hunter S. Thompson photo of the Hell’s Angels. The photo has a dual appeal: Jimmie’s first passion was motorcycle racing, and Chandra, whose serious interest in art was first sparked by the work of Irving Penn, loves that the Angels only allowed two photographers—Thompson and Penn—to shoot them.

The couples’ deep appreciation for art is evident throughout the house. In the dining room, the walls are covered in a slubby pale-aqua silk, the perfect foil for Jimmie’s favorite piece by Donald Judd. The ceiling is painted by the artist Damian Stamer, one of Chandra’s artists at SOCO, and is meant to lend the effect of looking up toward a forest’s canopy.

For the project’s final phase, the team tackled a guest room and pretty side-by-side bedrooms for daughters Evie and Lydia, both of which boast drawings by Elliott Puckette, whose work Chandra has also exhibited at the gallery. Before the overhaul, the house “was too put together,” says Chandra. “But now I can have a Twombly on one wall and also hang my children’s art nearby. Now the house is filled with all the things I love, and it’s a reflection of who Jimmie and I are as a couple.”