

RICHMOND MAGAZINE'S

# R·HOME

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## Designers at Home

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**Suellen Gregory,**  
Suellen Gregory Interior Design

BY JESSICA RONKY HADDAD  
PHOTOS BY KIP DAWKINS

# MIX MASTER

**THOUGH SHE STANDS JUST 5-FEET TALL,** Suellen Gregory is a giant in Richmond's interior design world. She's worked on some of the area's most beautiful houses, has had her work published in national magazines and has been a local tastemaker for 35 years.

Known for her ability to meld traditional décor with a modern sensibility, Gregory's work is sophisticated and timeless though never boring or staid.

She always wanted to be an interior designer — a cousin who lived in New York introduced her to the profession — but her parents, who had only eighth-grade educations — insisted she study liberal arts in college. After majoring in political science, Gregory worked for seven years as a special-education teacher before taking some art history and interior design classes at Virginia Commonwealth University. In 1981, she

and business partner Terry Massie opened The Best End in Carytown. The shop offered interior design services in a retail setting. In 1997, Gregory moved her design business into her home.

Gregory has lived in the same Cary Street Road house for the past 14 years and although it has slowly evolved over the years, it has always been a reflection of Gregory's gracious personality and varied interests, from reading, to travel, to art.

"A house is more than a bricks and mortar kind of thing," she says. "It's the life you live there." ▶





**LIVING ROOM**  
Layered shades of white provide a clean backdrop for an eclectic mix of contemporary art and antiques in Gregory's living room, where a glass-and-Lucite table is right at home alongside a classic wing chair.

## Q&A

### R•HOME: What appealed to you about this house?

**Suellen Gregory:** I could afford it and there was room for me and my four children. That was my criteria. ... It was all avocado green inside and out. The siding was avocado green and the trim inside was painted that Williamsburg green color.

### R•HOME: What are some things that have remained constant in your house over the past 14 years?

**Gregory:** [After I moved in] I wallpapered the dining room in the same wallpaper I had in my old house. Then, four years ago I had to have my ceilings replastered and Rick Holtz [who was doing the work] called to tell me that he was very sorry, but a lot of the wallpaper was peeling off of the walls and would have to be removed. I told him to go upstairs to find more paper. When [Osborne & Little] discontinued the pattern, I had bought 12 bolts. I have now had the same wallpaper for 25 years.

### R•HOME: What have you changed in your dining room?

**Gregory:** I had a Shades of Light chandelier I had bought on sale and brought with me from my previous house. I replaced that with a lantern by Coleen & Company. I painted the ceiling Calluna, a Farrow and Ball faint amethyst color. ... But the dining room has always had the same green paper and green curtains. To me the major upgrade was that lantern ... by changing the lighting in here it totally changed the way you thought about the room. The fabric on the chairs has been printed for 150 years. It's a Colefax and Fowler. The bar is Midcentury from Verve. I just feel like it all works. I think that's what makes it interesting; you can combine lots of styles.

### R•HOME: What inspires you?

**Gregory:** I love Instagram. To me, it's the most creative social media outlet out there. I do all of my own posting. But I am still very much a print person. ... I buy every single design magazine and I pore over them with a magnifying glass. ... Also, travel. I have daughters in New York and Charleston and I love to visit design centers and showrooms to see what they have done with their displays. I will fly to Atlanta and will go to ADAC (Atlanta Decorative Arts Center), spend two days there and go in and out of antiques shops and will just stir myself up.

In New York, I love to see how different hotels are decorated. ... That's a huge source of inspiration to me. And I love California. If I had gone there as a young person, I probably would have never come back.

### R•HOME: What do you suggest people invest their money in in their homes?

**Gregory:** I think you should buy things that are as good as you can afford. ... I always bought the best [furniture] I could afford at the time. In so doing, I've gotten furniture that has been recovered many times. ... Just like with clothes, if you want to do trendy, don't spend a lot of money on it. ... You don't want to see all of the things you've spent good money on in everybody's houses. ... Your kids will grow up with things they come to treasure. Buy things that reflect you. Don't just buy something to fill a space.



### BEFORE AND AFTER

Gregory has had the same Osborne & Little wallpaper in her dining room for 25 years. She recently updated the room (shown in 2012, above) by swapping the rug for patterned floors, changing upholstery and installing a dramatic new custom lantern by Coleen & Company.

### R•HOME: When you are exposed to so much on a daily basis, how do you make changes in your own home?

**Gregory:** It's hard because I want to like something for a really long time. ... I change pillows a lot. I have a closet full of vases and plateaus and I'm constantly doing different tablescapes. ... I'm always thinking about my house. ...

### R•HOME: What do you think has made you successful in this business?

**Gregory:** I think people hire me because I'm a good listener and I really take my job seriously. I allow and encourage design to be very personal. People have said, 'I want you to do my house

because you let me keep [whatever].' It's inconceivable to me that you wouldn't be able to keep what you love. ... To me, everything you like and treasure works together.

### R•HOME: What, to you, are hallmarks of a successful room design?

**Gregory:** Balance. If the room calls for Lucite and glass, I want to find just the right thing so that it is both traditional and modern. To me, it is all about the mix. It opens up so many possibilities if you are not confined to one style.

Comfort is huge and sensibility is huge. There are so many indoor/outdoor fabrics today, beautiful velvets that you can totally live with.

But the most important thing to me is that everybody loves where they live and are surrounded by the things they treasure. My job is to present them with options. ■

**"Buy things that reflect you. Don't just buy something to fill a space."**

—SUELLEN GREGORY





**DEN**  
Gregory is a voracious reader, and her cozy den is packed with stacks of books. A mix of art, accessories and fabrics reflect Gregory's personality, interests and talent for eclectic design.





**KITCHEN**  
Gregory remodeled the kitchen, with advice from friend Marvin Daniel of KDW Home, in 2003. It is configured to accommodate her 5-foot frame. "It's a short person's kitchen," she says.



**SUNNY NOOK**  
The kitchen's eat-in area showcases Gregory's collection of blue-and-white china on open shelving. A custom lantern by Coleen & Company, one of Gregory's favorite lighting sources, hangs over an antique dining table she has owned since the 1970s.

## SUELLEN'S DESIGN TIPS

### 1. Collections

Buy what you like and begin a collection. It makes such a statement. Your interiors will be personal and you'll have fun doing it. Books, pieces of coral, glass candlesticks — all of these things look great together.

### 2. Art

Buy the best art you can afford. Get to know our galleries, begin recognizing what you are drawn to — oils, works on paper, certain artists. Richmond is rich with wonderful art!

### 3. Photographs

I have glass on all the surfaces in my bedroom and I have put all of my favorite photos under the glass. It keeps the surfaces free of picture frames, which can look busy and cluttered.

### 4. Slipcovers

I love old wing chairs and slipper chairs. You can find them everywhere — antique shops, flea markets. They are inexpensive to buy and not terribly expensive to recover. A slipper chair can be slipcovered with just a few yards of fabric and can make a really wonderful statement in your room.

### 5. Lighting

I love good lighting; it can be interesting, stylish and sensible in terms of what it's purpose is. Chandeliers, pendants, floor and table lamps can be equally decorative and functional. Lamps can be painted, shades can be updated, finials can be changed. There are so many possibilities.



**BAR**  
A funky faux bamboo Mid-century bar from Verve Home Furnishings stands in contrast to the more traditional elements in Gregory's dining room. "I think that's what makes design interesting," she says. "You can combine a lot of styles."



"The most important thing to me is that everybody loves where they live and are surrounded by the things they treasure."

—SUELLEN GREGORY



**MASTER BEDROOM**  
Gregory's bedroom reflects her twin beliefs that comfort is a paramount design concern, and that people should surround themselves with things they love; in her case, both art and books.



**FOR THE GRANDKIDS**  
Gregory has turned a spare bedroom into a sanctuary and playroom for her young grandchildren. With its Voyagers wallpaper by Cowtan & Tout (now discontinued), it is kid-appropriate, yet sophisticated. The vertical bookshelf is by CB2.



**PORCH**  
Gregory loves to read on her covered porch, which features lanterns by Coleen & Company and a fun, oversized mirror she picked up in a backroom at Shades of Light.

