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Aim High

Two first-time gardeners go big on a budget
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MEREDITH SPECIALS

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Mary Kate found inexpensive fabric (\$5 a yard) on Etsy and had a pro make the drapes.



Mary Kate and Ben Carl (shown, right, with George) pitched the ceiling to give the cottage more volume. She painted the living room mantel and the trim throughout the house in her favorite shade of blue. The sofa and upholstered chairs were made by a local upholsterer, and a Frame TV looks like art over the mantel.



Blue-Sky Thinking

A clever use of space, plenty of hometown support, and gallons of blue paint made it possible for this young couple to remake a little cottage into their dream home.



Hang plates for quick, affordable wall art.

As young marrieds, Mary Kate and Ben Carl wanted a family and hoped to settle in Mary Kate’s hometown in the Texas Hill Country to be close to family and old friends. As luck would have it, one of those friends, a real estate agent and builder, was key to finding their first home, an 800-square-foot cottage in Boerne that wasn’t yet on the market. They hired an architect to rethink the floor plan, add dormer windows on the front, and plan an addition that would double its size.

Mary Kate used her experience as an interior designer to choose building materials like butcher block and classic subway tile that fit her budget so she could splurge in some places. In the kitchen, for example, she opted for paneling instead of tile for the backsplash but spent money on Carrara marble counters.

“One moment can make a room,” she says.

After nine months of construction, the couple moved in and began layering their favorite things, like family heirlooms from Ben’s grandmother, lamps and decorative plates from Round Top Antiques Fair, and comfortable upholstered seating.

Inspired by English design, Mary Kate found her favorite blue in Parma Gray from the British paint company Farrow & Ball, but it was beyond her budget. She color-matched the swatch to get the color at a better price and applied the powdery gray-blue throughout the house on the trim, fireplace mantel, and kitchen cabinets. She also used it on the exterior but at 50 percent saturation. “This was my first time making decisions on my own place,” she says. “White would have been safe, but to me blue is a neutral color. I thought, *You can never have too much blue.*”

The vertical lines of the painted paneling draw the eye up and give the kitchen a sense of spaciousness. Neutrals—the sealed butcher-block counter on the island and marble counters—complement the scheme.

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● An arched opening leads to the addition, which consists of the primary bedroom and a nursery, two baths, a pantry, and a small laundry.

● The couple repurposed the garage into an office. Cinder-block walls remain, but new checkered floor tile and woven shades elevate the space.

Mary Kate works remotely for Katie Davis Design, an interior design firm in Houston. She's found a client base in Texas Hill Country.



"I LOVE THE CONCEPT OF A SMALLER HOME WITH SHARED SPACES AND HOW IT FORCES YOU TO LIVE CLOSELY." —MARY KATE CARL



● The wallpapered bathroom accommodates both guests and kids. Mary Kate says she wanted to make it look like a "fun powder room."

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Mary Kate and Ben's headboard and some bedding were blue, so she picked simple white paint for the bedroom walls and trim. She chose affordable striped yardage for the window treatments. "Custom fabrication makes cheap fabric look expensive," she says.

← Give your lighting variety: Mix fixtures, lamps, and sconces.



"PAINTING THE EXTERIOR BLUE WAS A REAL SHOCK TO MY EYE. I NEEDED TIME TO SIT WITH IT AND ADJUST TO CHANGE."

—MARY KATE CARL



● The Carls use the outdoor dining space for entertaining, candlelight dinners on at-home date nights, and Saturday lunches. The freestanding pergola gives relief from the sun. Loose pea gravel is easy to maintain and chokes out weeds.

● Ben focused on transforming the backyard, *above right*, into another "room" for entertaining, adding a patio, firepit, and putting green. Friends and family gather to watch golf tournaments and college football games on the outdoor television.

● Mary Kate worked with an architect to add symmetrical dormers to the front of the cottage. "The dormers make the living area feel light and airy. We face north, so we have a nice glow without the intense heat from the sunlight," she says. ■

