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DESIGN & REALTY

home

The Hinchses' light-filled, neutral-toned living room is the heart of their home.

HOME FIELD ADVANTAGE

Interior designer Melanie King helps Houston Astros manager A.J. Hinch and his wife, Erin, create a cozy family abode in The Woodlands.

By Rhonda Reinhart // Photography by Julie Soefer

Before A.J. Hinch landed in Texas in 2014—to head up the 2017 World Series-winning Houston Astros—he and his wife had lived in the greater metro areas of Oakland, Kansas City, Detroit, Philadelphia, Arizona and San Diego. Such is life in Major League Baseball, where getting a new job means moving to a new city, sometimes in a matter of months. All that bouncing around from town to town is old news now, though, as the Hinchses and their two daughters have settled into life in Houston—specifically into their four-bedroom home in The Woodlands, which they bought brand-new several years ago.

Because the house was a spec home that was close to completion when they found it, the Hinchses had few choices they could make for the finish-out. So even though they got the space they needed in a location they loved, they didn't get the custom touches that

would have made the dwelling special to them. After living in the house for a while, they were finally ready to make some adjustments, so they turned to interior designer Melanie King (melaniekingdesigns.com), who was referred to them by a mutual friend. "We decided it was time to hire someone to help merge our styles and finish our look," says Erin. Adds A.J.: "Our goal was to brighten up our house and give it a feel that felt more like us. We really enjoy our time at home and wanted to make sure we had a house style that matched our family."

The first thing King noticed when she visited the Hinch home for her initial design consultation was how outdated the Mediterranean-style house felt, even though it was only a few years old. "Everything felt dark. Everything was just really, really heavy," she says, noting the original, dark chiseled wood



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—A.J. HINCH, HOMEOWNER »

From top: The breakfast room is perfect for quick meals for this on-the-go family of four: A.J. and Erin Hinch; the kitchen was transformed with new paint, hardware, lighting, countertops, window treatments and seating.



floors, the crosshatch-patterned travertine floor inlay, the dark stained molding and the yellowish paint throughout. “The finishes felt like an afterthought. It was just heavy and dated.”

Because Erin and A.J. at one time had considered selling the house, they were able to show King images of properties that had caught their eye while they were looking at other places. The biggest differences King saw between their house and the ones they presented to her were that the other homes were lighter, brighter and had cleaner lines. “They wanted their house to be transitional,” says the designer. “They wanted it to be very clean and comfortable, and to feel open and brighter.” So King made her suggestions for improvement—and she didn’t sugarcoat things. “At the end of the meeting, A.J. said, ‘So, what you’re telling me is every surface needs to be touched,’” the designer recalls. Her response? Ultimately, yes: “The thing is, you can make one change, but you’re going to have to update almost all of these areas until you actually feel like it’s changed. Otherwise, it’s going to feel like it’s not 100 percent [complete].”

After initially planning to ease into the redesign—focusing mostly on new furnishings, window treatments and paint colors—the Hinchs decided to take King’s advice and tackle the whole house. The entire project took about a year and included remodeling and gutting several spaces in the 5,700-square-foot residence. Plus, as A.J. suspected, every surface ended up being touched. In addition to removing the crosshatch-patterned floors in the downstairs area and replacing them with light-gray tile to complement the new pale-gray paint throughout, King and her team closed up several of the passé wall niches and floor-to-ceiling arches that were prevalent throughout the house. “We simplified,” says the designer. Other changes included incorporating new lighting throughout, plus removing the mantel of the fireplace in the foyer and creating a new facade made of stacked stone.

Aesthetically, the Hinchs wanted the interiors...CONTINUED





Clockwise from top: Wooden ceiling beams add character to the master suite, where custom bedding and window treatments complete the space; the master bathroom is a true place of respite, with a free-standing Kohler tub and painting from Benson-Cobb; King softened the home's Mediterranean influences with dreamy abstract artworks and vignettes of cozy upholstered pieces.



« *“Melanie pushed us to try some design outside of our comfort zone, but the end result is a house that still feels personal to us.”*

—ERIN HINCH, HOMEOWNER »

...CONTINUED to reflect a mixture of styles. “They would say things like, ‘We want rustic, but we want it coastal,’” King says, recalling the homeowners’ previous addresses in Arizona and California. “Our design preferences have evolved over the years,” Erin explains, “and have been influenced by places we’ve lived.” In the family room, that mix of design elements can be found in the large-scale dark wood coffee table combined with the ocean-blue art and accessories, all set against a neutral backdrop. “We kept with more subtle earth tones,” says King. “You’ll see through the whole house there aren’t a lot of brights. They do enjoy blues, so we would pull blues in.” The family room ended up being Erin’s favorite space in the revamped house. “It has a bright, elevated-casual feel that makes me happy whenever I am relaxing there and we are all spending time together,” she says.

The overall outcome of the redesign—from the remodeled laundry room and dressed-up formal dining room to the transformed kitchen and master bath—is a home that’s comfortable, inviting and perfectly suited to the whole Hinch family. “Melanie pushed us to try some design outside of our comfort zone,” says Erin, “but the end result is a house that still feels personal to us.” A.J. agrees: “She understood what we were trying to accomplish and came across as very genuine in her willingness to match our vision. She did everything she promised and more.” ■