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Family Matters

Kids and pets have the run of this Chicago home, but you'd never know it thanks to a selection of super-chic furnishings covered with super-sturdy fabrics.

written by Amy Elbert photographer Gordon Beall field editor Hilary Rose

A wall of windows in the sunroom, which opens onto the kitchen and dining area, gives Kristie and Mike Edwards the perfect vantage point to watch children playing outdoors while enjoying a cup of coffee. Fabrics featuring pops of lime and turquoise add a punch of color to the room's crisp neutral scheme.





This photo: A grand piano sits in the music room's pointed bay window. "It's a great spot to look up and down the street," architect Fred Wilson says. "It's sort of like the prow of a ship."

Opposite: Windows of all shapes and sizes add interest to the home's exterior and flood the interiors with natural light.

Blessings are meant to be shared.

At least that's how Kristie and Mike Edwards feel. Even as 20-something college graduates with only a few dollars to their name, they dedicated much of their after-work hours to coaching baseball and mentoring 9- to 12-year-old boys from one of Chicago's toughest neighborhoods. Almost two decades later—blessed with financial success and three children—the Edwardses continue to share their time, money, hearts, and home with various young people.

So when friends told them about a 50-foot-wide lot for sale in the quiet residential neighborhood of Ravenswood in Chicago, the Edwardses jumped at the chance to build a city house that would nurture their family and all those who come into contact with them—which is no small number. Most nights, the family expands to include their children's friends and high school students attending Chicago Hope Academy, a coed, nondenominational Christian high school on Chicago's west side that Kristie and Mike helped found. In addition, two boys attending the academy live with them during the school week.

Architect Fred Wilson enthusiastically embraced the couple's vision for a light-filled, family-centered house. He designed a 5,500-square-foot house that is technically a four-level split in traditional disguise with inviting family-hangout spaces scattered throughout. "I wanted to really live in the whole house, and I wanted everyone else to feel like they could, too," Kristie says.

Dark-stained hardwood floors throughout contrast with super-white walls, which Kristie insisted on to create a crisp, clean backdrop. A medley of textures—all in soothing neutral hues—pop against the walls. In the living room, interior designer Nancy Bernstein opted for chenille-upholstered chairs and a cream-color leather sofa that was pretty enough to win Kristie's approval yet also able to stand up to a household of youngsters and two dogs.

To strengthen the chenille and other upholstery fabrics, Bernstein reinforced them with a knit backing. "The house had to work for their family," Bernstein says. "It had to be durable, low-maintenance, and inviting."

Chocolate-brown leather armchairs also stand up beautifully to wear and tear in the music room above the garage. The dark fabric is offset by streams of natural light, which enter the room through clerestory windows and bounce off a dramatic barrel-vaulted ceiling that is 17½ feet at its apex.

The airy feeling continues in the kitchen, where 10½-foot ceilings and large windows highlight stone floors, granite and marble countertops, and a variety of spacious seating areas used nightly for feeding family and friends. The house, after all, was designed to host a crowd. "We have people coming over all the time," Kristie says. "And we always have room for more."





The living room's sophisticated palette of creams and browns is deceptively kid-friendly thanks to heavy-duty chenille and leather fabrics that work with the grass-cloth-covered walls to create textural interest. Kristie and Mike often gather here with the children in the evenings to watch television. The flat-panel TV is mounted above the fireplace; when not in use, it's concealed by a painting that rolls over the screen.



“We had the best team working on this house.



Opposite: Stone floors, marble and subway-tile backsplashes, a coffered ceiling, and custom-made cabinets give the kitchen a vintage character appropriate to the house’s established neighborhood. **Left:** Grass cloth warms the master bedroom walls; a leather headboard and wicker armchairs on the balcony create a textural tableau. **Below:** In lieu of a formal dining room, a relaxed dining area offers plenty of room for family entertaining. The Edwards children do homework and crafts at the counter between the kitchen and dining area. The doors to the left of the open French doors conceal a computer workstation.



When we walked in, we immediately felt that we were home.”
 —HOMEOWNER KRISTIE EDWARDS