



Before Nomita and Shammi Gupta acquired this Craftsman home in uptown New Orleans, they pined after it for seven years. It would be a few more before they were able to turn it into the colorful dream home they always wanted, but the result was well worth the wait!

MAKING NEW HISTORY IN NEW ORLEANS

BY ANTHEA GERRIE | PHOTOGRAPHY BY SARA ESSEX BRADLEY

A house must be very special for its owners to hanker after it for seven years. Not to mention having to wait almost as long again to start working their own magic on it.

This could only be a home that haunts the imagination for years, even after the dream of making it your own ceases to be a possibility. Then, it seduces you again with an unexpected second chance. And the lucky owners of this Craftsman gem in New Orleans feel even luckier to have had years to discover, while waiting to start work, exactly how they could best make their historic home work for a modern family.

"For me it has always been about falling in love with a house," explains Nomita Gupta, the second-chance homeowner whose imagination was first ignited while out exploring the city's Uptown neighborhood with her physician husband, Shammi. They fell in love not just with the house, but with leafy Napoleon Avenue as well. "We loved the beautiful trees, the broad median, and the 1920s homes, which reminded me of mansions in Bangalore, where I grew up," she explains of the 2004 trip as she and Shammi were scouting larger houses while pregnant with their second child.



Unique window coverings and backdrops for shelving are made from wallpaper, such as this vibrant jungle print by Cole & Son.

And there it was—a 1920s gem flawed by a fallen-in porch and a backyard turned into a concrete parking lot. The neglected house had been chopped up into apartments. “It was in disrepair but still beautiful,” explains Nomita, who felt her experience renovating period homes would help her restore this one to its former glory. She fell in love with the beautiful hardwood floors, the high ceilings punctuated by soaring windows, and the luxurious details like the oversize solid cypress doors. “I was reminded of homes in India built around the same time.”

But the love affair was not to be—at least not then. “We made an offer, which was rejected, and the owner didn’t even want to negotiate,” says Nomita. She only learned by chance that the house had come on the market again in 2011.

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“It had gone into foreclosure, and I only realized it had been bought by a developer when he came to my business looking for something for the house he was working on,” says Nomita, whose Magazine Street store, Spruce, specializes in wallpaper, fabric, and design. “It was the house we had had a crush on—but by this time my son was five or six and we had bought another house. However a day later the owner—who had done the heavy work fixing the porch and installing
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time my son was five or six, and we had bought another house. However, a day later, the owner—who had done the heavy work, fixing the porch and installing new wiring and plumbing—asked if I would be interested if the house were for sale, and we bought it mid-renovation.”

It would be another long wait before the family managed to turn the house into their dream home. “Major construction started outside our home almost immediately after we moved in and was with us for six years; it became a challenge even bringing groceries in,” Nomita recalls. Undeterred, the couple started with the backyard, transforming the car park of old into a garden for their children, Simran, now 18, and Yash, 15. “We uprooted the concrete, put down grass, and planted bamboo along two sides because it was evergreen, hardy, and fast growing.” A native of a vibrant Indian city famous for its botanical garden, Nomita channeled her adopted homeland in her choice of plants. “I landscaped with bottlebrush, crape myrtle, different types of magnolias, and azaleas.”



And while the children played, their parents thought (and sometimes rethought) the interior spaces. “I am a firm believer that in a historic home, you start using rooms in a different way than you intended, and the years of waiting gave us some insight in how we wanted to use the house,” Nomita says.

One of the six bedrooms was converted into the family room, which is the heart of every modern American home and important to Nomita and her husband “because we don’t like having a television in the main living room where we like having dinner parties and conversation.” Another bedroom became a master bathroom, which is in many ways the most stunning room in the house. “The focal point is the picture behind the bathtub; it’s by a mural artist I discovered on a buying trip after I opened a wallpaper showroom. I bought and framed one full repeat of the large pattern to gaze on when I relax in the bathtub before bed, pretty well every night—it reminds me of *Les Femmes d’Alger*,” she says, referring to Picasso’s pre-Cubist masterpiece.

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“Every find and piece of furniture has a story.”

As the children grew, the garden gained a pool, and now that Simran has started her college studies at Tulane, Nomita says half-jokingly, “I have another room to play with as, although she is studying nearby, she is in the dorms.”

When it comes to her decor, Nomita says, "Every find and piece of furniture has a story." Her love of vintage is evidenced by her support of the Green Project, a local initiative for repurposing and upcycling architectural salvage. It has proven a source for key pieces of furniture in the living room and guest room. But what is truly original to Nomita is her use of wallpaper for window coverings and backdrops rather than conventional use alone. "Most New Orleans houses have floor-to-ceiling drapes, but I like to let the light in," she explains. "My paper wall coverings are not blinds; you don't pull them up but can still look out and see the greenery through them." An exotic jungle print serving as a colorful backdrop to white bookshelves above a bar also turns out to be high-end wallpaper by Cole & Son.



Nomita's eclectic yet elegant taste extends from her home to her Magazine Street store, Spruce, which offers a variety of beautiful fabrics, wallpapers, art, and more.

The headily eclectic mix of styles, materials, and sources reflects the fact Nomita has absorbed local influences like a sponge since arriving in the US in 1989 to study architecture at LSU; yet she remains attached to indelible memories of home. "Everything has a story, from a dish to the doors. My style is organic, combining my Indian background, Western education, and modern lifestyle," she says. "My home is my vanity—a direct extension of who I am, and I have obsessed over it for so long, from actually acquiring it to renovating it and finally decorating it."

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Visit [SpruceNola.com \(https://www.sprucenola.com/\)](https://www.sprucenola.com/) to learn more about Nomita's design shop on Magazine Street.

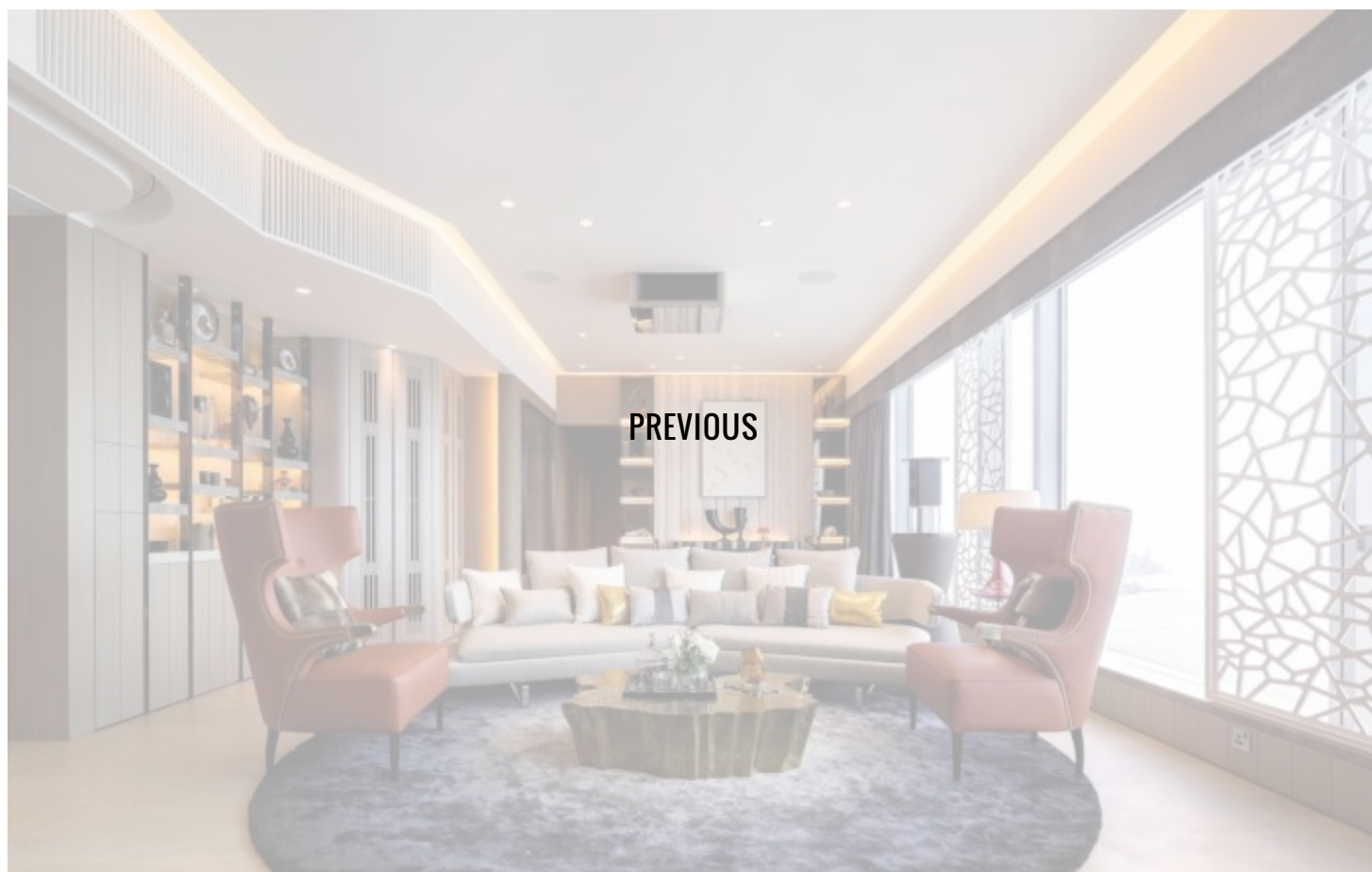
Anthea Gerrie is based in the UK but travels the world in search of stories. Her special interests are architecture and design, culture, food, and drink, as well as the best places to visit in the world's great playgrounds. She is a regular contributor to the Daily Mail, the Independent, and Blueprint.

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