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In 2006, architect Virginia Kelsey visited England to tour the homes of her design hero, Edwin Lutyens, touted as one of the greatest British architects of the 20th century. Using exceptional craftsmanship to reinforce his designs, Lutyens was a master at mixing the Cotswold vernacular with more formal classicism—elements Kelsey brought to a home renovation nearly 10 years later on a wooded 2½-acre site in Houston. “Lutyens’ underlying complexity, masked as simplicity thanks to his adept use of materials, is what I strive for,” Kelsey says. “He wouldn’t hesitate to mix a Georgian exterior with a floor plan that’s nothing like a Georgian.”

With Jake Housberg as builder, Kelsey transformed the exterior of her clients’ residence into a style reminiscent of an English country manor while reshaping the interiors with an open floor plan more suitable to modern life. The owners had built the house for their growing family in the 1990s, but with their adult children now out the door, they were

ready to update with a more British flair. “It was mostly design elements that bothered me,” the wife recalls of the dated structure. “I love plaster walls, and ours had a faux finish. I also disliked the maintenance on the mahogany windows, which had turned orange over time.”

In keeping with Lutyens’ ethos, Kelsey strived for a richness of materials, beginning with the structure’s façade. She removed the exterior Austin limestone and then placed it back in a slightly different pattern with additional mortar left visible for an aged appearance. “The mortar has such a significant effect on how the stone looks,” the architect says. She also replaced the existing roof with reclaimed Ludowici clay tile salvaged from a federal building in St. Louis and changed the soffits and overhangs for an English countenance.

The quest for authenticity continued with the grounds, which received a major facelift. Working with landscape designer Daryl McCann—alongside codesigner and



Opposite: On the grounds of a Houston home, architect Virginia Kelsey relocated the swimming pool—installed by Water Line Designs—and added a pair of 19th-century French dog statues, purchased at Chateau Domingue. Nearby, Janus et Cie Deauville lounge chairs surround a table with a cast-stone top and an antique base from W. Gardner, Ltd. Grabill Windows & Doors in Almont, Michigan, supplied the windows.

Below: Felipe Segovia Construction reworked the existing stone on the exterior, while David Alvarez Sheet Metal installed the reclaimed Ludowici roof tile from The Roof Tile & Slate Company; Insight Structures, Inc. handled the home's structural engineering. New stone coping by QTS updates the pond, as do the plantings supplied by Pond Pros of Houston. McDugald-Steele oversaw the landscape design. Exterior lighting is by Stirling Electric.

