

One Piece AT A TIME

An interior designer—and granddaughter to musical royalty—walks the line with her new husband as they complete an ambitious transformation of a derelict 1960 home.

BY KRISTIN LUNA. PHOTOS BY SHANNON FONTAINE.



Hannah Crowell and James Wilson's tale is more than one about a house; it's a love story of discarding the past and starting fresh.

The owner of Crowell + Co. Interiors met Wilson more than 20 years ago—in algebra class, of all places—at University School of Nashville. They dated for a decade, then took a ten-year break, during which each went on to marry other people. Crowell had two daughters and was back living in Nashville after flitting between coasts when Wilson, who was residing in Brooklyn at the time, came to town and asked her out for a drink. By then, they were both divorced and realized immediately that they were always meant to be together.

After waiting so long, Crowell and Wilson

still didn't rush into things: They dated for three years before starting to look for a home to make their own. The couple knew they wanted a single-story, mid-century ranch house with good bones and a property they could transform that wouldn't be *too* much of a money pit.

"We looked at one place that was like Carcosa out of *True Detective*," Crowell laughs. "It was horrifying."

Eventually, they found the perfect fit—a 2,400-square-foot house perched on a sloped, two-and-a-half-acre lot high above West Meade—and immediately made an offer. In April 2014, they closed on their new home—and Wilson proposed.

"I knew he had the ring and was just ready for him to ask me to marry him and be done with it," Crowell recalls of their closing day. "But he was wearing work clothes, so I thought, 'Well, I

guess this isn't happening today...*again*.'"

Crowell was wrong. Wilson, who later apologized for his attire, had sneakily hidden the ring in a kitchen drawer and popped the question that day.

Then the real work began. Two days after closing, the walls came down—in some cases, quite literally—and it was out with the old and in with the new. Wilson sold his East Nashville house and worked 12- to 16-hour days for the next three months, getting the new home in a livable state so that he, Crowell, and her daughters could move in by July.

The pair shared creative input, though Crowell continued to work full-time while Wilson—who has a background in set design, painting, furniture building, and even fashion consulting for men's wear from his days spent in New York—tackled the bulk >>>





Before



Before

Crowell says gutting the “really awful mess of a kitchen” was one of the more challenging components of the renovation. “It was the most claustrophobic, disgusting thing,” Wilson adds. They pulled out the upper cabinets, installed shelves for storage, knocked down a wall to open the space, and added plenty of custom components, like sleek circular Bocci outlets that are embedded in the backsplash tile and were inspired by the couple’s stay at the 21c Hotel in Cincinnati.

of the manual labor himself. Major components of the early renovation process included stripping the walls of dated wood paneling and ripping up carpet and linoleum that concealed multiple layers of pet urine and asbestos. Both bathrooms underwent major transformations with new tile, sinks, tubs, and a stall shower in the master.

Crowell is the first to admit they went over their budget once they got knee-deep into the gut job. "When you open up a house, you are constantly finding little 'surprises' that take time and money to fix," Wilson adds. "Cosmetically, that's one thing—'Oh, we'll wallpaper this room and put a chair there'—but when you get into structurally trying to shore up a house, it's Pandora's box."

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Like most couples—particularly when it's a pair of creatives with very different visions—Crowell and Wilson say they often butted heads when it came down to mapping out the aesthetic. For one, Crowell wanted color, while Wilson preferred an austere palette. And also like many couples, they quickly learned to compromise: Wilson got his white walls, but Crowell was able to add pops of color with statement pieces like a blue velvet couch dressed up with fuchsia pillows in the living room and a bold Hygge & West-papered accent wall in her youngest daughter's room.

"Blending our [existing] furniture was a nice exercise in compromise and editing," Wilson says.

"And by 'nice,' he means really 'difficult,'" Crowell chimes in. "For months, there was nothing on the walls because we couldn't agree on it!" >>>



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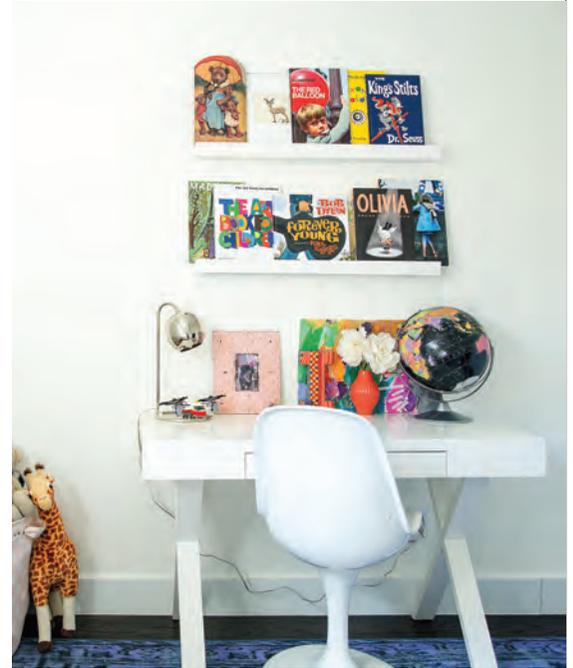
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From top to bottom:

Each of Crowell's daughters' bedrooms maintains the feel of the rest of the house while still having its own personality. Eight-year-old Adeline, who Crowell calls "the girly one," got her pink accents while seven-year-old Iris, a voracious reader, has shelves of books over her desk. Crowell's musical upbringing is reflected in other parts of the house with a large piano in the living room and other instruments and memorabilia throughout the home. The most dramatic change the couple made was the guest bathroom, which went from a pink scheme to a clean white-and-black palette with subway tiles, a new shower, and updated fixtures.



That's no longer the case; now, every bookshelf and countertop is tastefully adorned with books and trinkets, each with its own backstory. Clean lines and a minimalistic design punctuate the home, but the couple gave it a personality of its own via multiple textures and layers. Though Crowell herself is not a musician, she grew up immersed in that world—

There are plenty of Johnny Cash accents, like old photos and a coffee table book—all a nod to Crowell's late grandfather.

her parents are Grammy-winning artists Rosanne Cash and Rodney Crowell—and that upbringing shines throughout the home with a large piano and multiple guitars on display. Atop the piano, which Crowell inherited when it was left behind in a previous home, sits a sea fan from the couple's Mexico honeymoon that they nearly didn't get past customs. The mantel showcases various rocks and pieces of wood that Wilson has collected on hikes with the girls. The bookshelves are stocked with memorabilia and other odds and ends, like plastic army figurines that Wilson unearthed while peeling away the flooring and a toy gun he found in the yard. And of course, there are plenty of Johnny Cash accents, like old photos and a coffee table book—all a nod to Crowell's late grandfather.

By last summer, the Crowell-Wilson house was mostly complete—though the designers will no doubt tweak and add to it in the coming years, particularly if they have another child as they're hoping to do—and in October, they were married on the back lawn of their newly rehabbed home.

"We will die here," Crowell says. "We're never leaving."

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