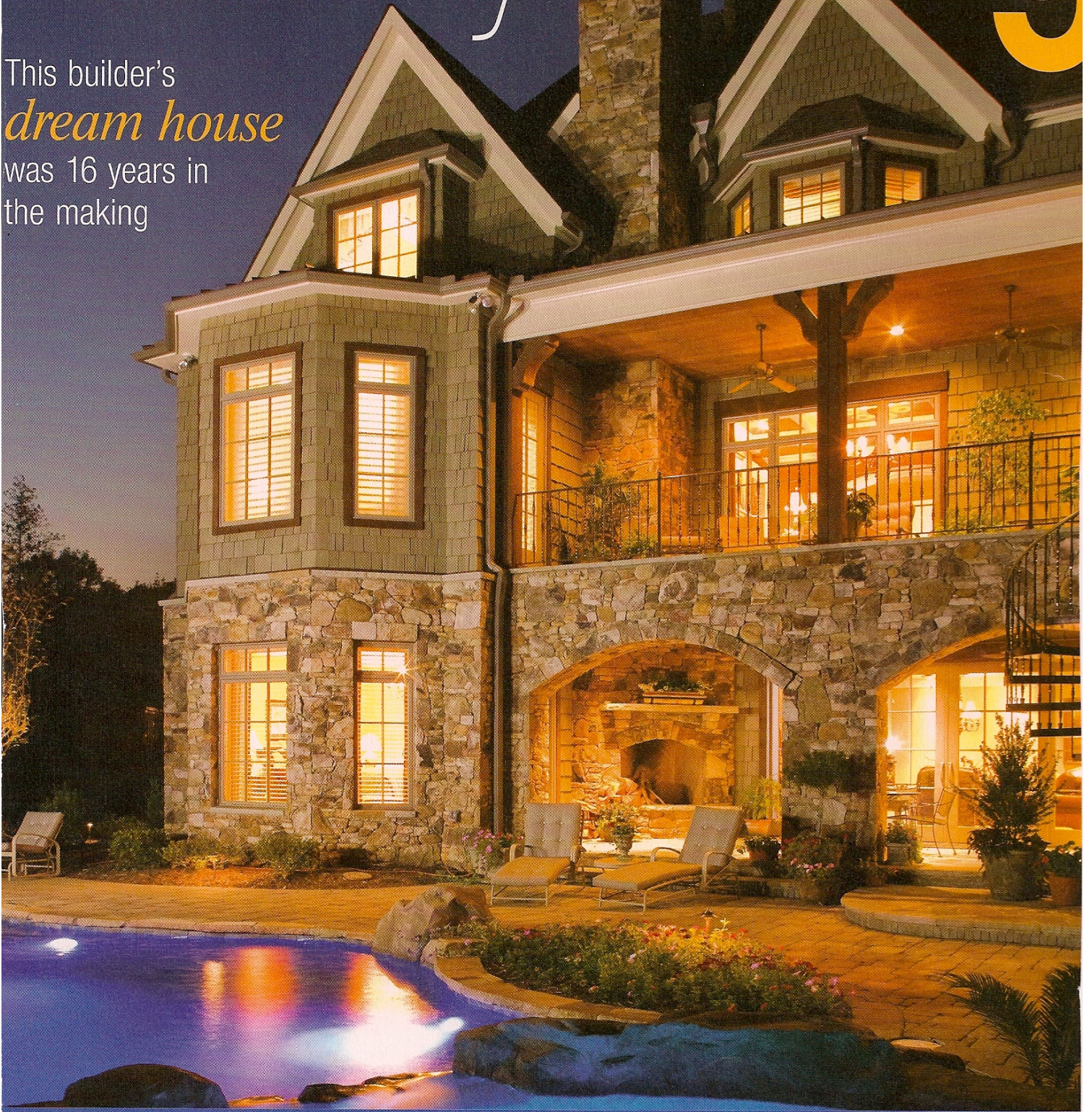


LUXURY Living

This builder's
dream house
was 16 years in
the making



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A little something extra

Pastels and understated furnishings aren't part of Lucy and Company's winsome rooms for children

A s interior designers go, Beth Keim is the villain of vanilla.

by Laura Williams-Tracy

Her signature kids' rooms demonstrate that bold color is what makes kids — and their parents — happy. Right down to the bowl of yellow, pink and purple chocolate candies in the East Boulevard showroom of Lucy and Company, Keim displays the vibrant color and pattern combinations that have made her room designs fun-loving and kid-friendly.

"You don't have to do a pink nursery or a blue nursery," says Keim, who drives a burnt-orange Honda Element and painted her children's playroom orange and green with a checkerboard floor. "It's unlimited the things you can do to make it personal."

Though she will add design touches to any room a client wants, Keim has built Lucy and Company — named after her oldest daughter — around creating unique and functional bedrooms and playrooms for babies, young children and teen-agers.

Her designs follow two guiding principles: Babies' rooms don't have to be pink



photo courtesy LUCY AND COMPANY

Lucy and Company has found a market for children's rooms that feature bold design elements.

or blue and rooms should grow with a child. A newborn can come home to a nursery of pink and orange, and once the crib moves out, the underlying designs should carry her well into girlhood.

Unlike Pottery Barn Kids or mail-order catalog Land of Nod, which offer buyers traditional furnishings with understated plaids and flowers, a tour of Lucy and Company's showroom is a cacophony of bold and bright colors, and unusual custom bedding, window treatments, rugs and furniture.

In one corner is a one-of-a-kind twin bed and matching dresser covered in twigs by a custom-furniture maker in Oklahoma. Nearby is a custom rug made in Peru. Along the walls is a panorama of plaids, polka-dots, stripes and giant geometric patterns painted by Keim's artist husband and business partner.

A former legal assistant who grew up in Connecticut with parents who enjoyed remodeling homes, Keim knew early on her personality was more suited to owning a creative business than managing



photo NANCY PIERCE

Beth Keim left behind the limited thrills of being a legal assistant to gain national acclaim for her East Boulevard-based design business.

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legal files. She began faux painting on the side and made friends with Charlotte interior designer Barbara Jordan, who fed her jobs.

In 1995, Keim was buying paint for a job when she met her future husband, Keith, at a paint store. Their artistic backgrounds melded, and they began working together.

In 2001, Keim opened a small gallery called Lucy and Company on Commonwealth Avenue in Plaza Midwood to show off their faux-painting techniques. It wasn't long before Keim decided she needed furniture in the store to show off the walls, and before long, Lucy and Company had ventured into full-room design.

Focusing on children's rooms was a unique niche in Charlotte. To meet demand, Keim added interior designer Kim Dwyer to her staff.

"We were small potatoes," Keim says. "We had one computer between the two of us."

Business took off in 2004 when *Better Homes & Gardens* featured Keim's daughter's hot-pink room and a boy's nursery in a specialty publication. The

"Kids deserve a room that reflects their personality."

Beth Keim

magazine's editors were hooked on Lucy and Company's style and returned over and over to feature its work.

"That started people talking because we've now been in it nine times," Keim says.

In 2006, Lucy and Company moved from Commonwealth Avenue to the East Boulevard showroom that Keim pur-



photo courtesy LUCY AND COMPANY

chased and renovated. Picture frames, wall art and other decorative items are for sale, but most items are merely displays and examples of what can be ordered or custom made.

The showroom puts Lucy and Company squarely in the middle of most of her clients from the in-town neighborhoods of Dilworth, Eastover, Myers Park and Elizabeth.

Business has more than doubled in the new location, and Lucy and Company now employs a staff of eight who juggle upwards of 75 clients at a time.

Keim's dream is to open stores in other markets with local designers free to create their own designs within the overall style of Lucy and Company.

"People come in here from out of town and say there's nothing like this back in their city," Keim says of her showroom.

"Beth can take up where you started from and twist it to give you something that pops," says Tonya Reid, who has hired Keim to design three homes for her as well as her colorful T.Reid Salon on East Boulevard, located in a 1905 Arts and Crafts home.

The result is striking enough for Reid's salon to have been included in this month's Dilworth Home Tour.

And while Reid is admittedly daring when it comes to using color, "I've seen

Beth work with people who are not. She's great for getting you comfortably out of your box."

Keim and her team design nurseries so the crib can be pulled out and a big bed put in without major alterations to the color scheme.

Light fixtures picked for a baby girl's room, for example, have life when the girl is well into her teens.

The average full-room makeover costs about \$4,000, but some clients' tastes have run as high as \$12,000.

Many of her clients have second homes in the mountains or at the beach, and she has taken her talents to distant design jobs as well.

Some clients like to take the "pop" and surprise of a Lucy and Company room further. For a half-dozen of its clients, Lucy and Company has delivered a surprise nursery.

Couples who are having a baby but don't want to know the baby's sex ahead of time face a decorating dilemma. They often don't want to do a gender-neutral design.

Lucy and Company's solution is for the clients to come to the showroom and pick out their favorite colors and designs for both a boy's room and a girl's room.

The firm can do a "surprise nursery" during the brief time a client is in the hospital for delivery.

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The couple then entrusts Keim and her staff with the result of the baby's ultrasound, which is sealed in an envelope, keeping the baby's gender a secret from the parents.

Based on the ultrasound, Lucy and Company designs the room and orders all of the bedding, rug and other elements, storing them at the showroom until mom heads to the hospital.

Then Lucy and Company staff spring into action with a roughly two-day deadline to paint the room and pull it all together before the family and bundle of joy return home.

"They leave with nothing but shower gifts on the floor of the nursery, and they come home to a room that's all done," she says.

For older children, Keim and staff work to create a room that reflects the child's personality.

That means they often meet alone with the children to discuss color and pattern selections and other features after the parents have established parameters and budgets.

"Kids deserve a room that reflects their personality," Keim says. ❖



photo courtesy LUCY AND COMPANY

