

# New family room leaves all smiling

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Everything New Orleans



By Andrew Adler

**LEAVE IT TO A PRO:** With multiple academic degrees between them, Gerald Myers and Gillian Eggleston might've been expected to employ the scientific method when deciding what sort of new family room would suit their 1950s Lakeview home.



Photos by Matthew Hinton / The Times-Picayune

The family room's new design accommodates the television and other up-to-date audio/visual equipment, as well as Gerald Myers' classic turntable.

His wife, a 47-year-old British-born scientist employed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in New Orleans, also realized that another set of eyes was vital.

"I could never have come up with this," Eggleston said, glancing around the now-finished family space.

Eventually they found Suzanne Stafford of Elemental Design, a commercial designer who wanted to expand into the residential market.

"She showed us some of the work she had done, and it kind of fit the more contemporary theme we were shooting for," Myers said.

Instead, they trusted their instincts -- and the experience of an interior designer.

"We wanted to make that space a bit more usable, and just modernize it a bit more," recalled Myers, a 46-year-old plant geneticist who teaches at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge.

"We could've just gone out and bought a \$6,000 entertainment system to slap on the wall, but that wouldn't look right. It'd be obvious that it wasn't built in. So we thought, let's get somebody here who maybe could design something we could live in."

Their single-story home, built in 1957 just a few steps from the Lake Pontchartrain levee, boasted a few quirky elements, such as the bathroom that's laid out as an extended trapezoid with a counter that juts out at an unexpected angle. Elsewhere, the home includes plenty of glass fronting an outdoor pool.

**FLOOD-PROOFING PRIORITIES:** Myers and Eggleston -- along with their two children -- moved in four years ago.

## PERSONAL SPACE

**THE HOUSE:** A 1957 ranch house in Lakeview

**THE OWNERS:** Gerald Myers and Gillian Eggleston

**THE SPACE:** A kid-friendly and comfortable family room

**WHY THEY LOVE IT:** It provides an alternative to the existing formal living room, with custom shelving, a family office and an audio/visual space, and accommodates a favorite L-shaped red leather couch.

Their previous home had been ravaged by post-Katrina flooding, and they spent an interim year in Hammond before returning to the New Orleans area.

Not surprisingly, the couple's principal imperative for their next house "was a place that didn't flood," Myers said. So one day while driving around, their daughter, Grace, spotted an appropriate candidate for sale.



The family lived in the home for two years before deciding a new family room was in order. They wanted an alternative to the existing formal living room (where Eggleston hosts meetings of the Daughters of the British Empire), a place that could accommodate an expansive, L-shaped red leather couch.

Previous owners had installed, and then ripped out, a small wet bar in what was a general-purpose space.

"All that was left were the floor drains, and they dated this room," Myers said. "So we felt that since we spend a lot of time here, let's modernize it a bit, make it more kid-friendly and more comfortable for us."

The renovation enlarged the shared family office, and shelves were added for display of art works and for storage.

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In addition to the couch, everyone was extremely attached to the existing curtain, whose slender red stripes complemented the broad areas of adjacent leather. Alongside Stafford, a workable vision was established.

"One of the things she brought in fairly early on was an IKEA catalog," Myers said. "We contemplated getting that and building around it, but she wound up designing (the room) based on something IKEA actually made": a white wall with compartments and shelves to accommodate various collectibles.

There was also space for Myers' beloved stereo equipment, particularly a turntable that marks him as a proud audio child of the 1970s.

**SIX-MONTH PROJECT:** "She started bringing materials to us," Eggleston said of Stafford's methodology. "We met maybe once every other week, when she would bring fabric swatches and paint palettes, trying to find out what would work."

Despite the inevitable intrusions, Eggleston found the entire project to be something of a relief, especially compared to how she felt about the old room.

"It was really getting on my nerves how shabby it was," she said. "It was horrible."

The new family room was ready last fall, about six months after the beginning of construction. The design and construction ran over budget, but the costs never spiraled out of control.

"We hoped to do it somewhere in the \$20,000-\$25,000 range," Eggleston said. "It wound up just under \$30,000."

Although the room is fundamentally simple, it deftly manages to capture some of the couples' personalities. Look up, and you'll see serpentine track lighting suggested by the interior of a favorite neighborhood restaurant.

"One of the things about living in Lakeview is that you eat at Reginelli's, so that was kind of the inspiration," Myers said.

Has the new family space had the desired effect?

"Let's put it this way," Eggleston said with a smile. "I'm much happier with this room."



Gerald Myers and Gillian Eggleston and their two children, Grace and Ben, lived in their Lakeview home for two years before deciding a new family room was in order.