

THE BIG



RIGHT Allie Balling followed her intuition to create a bold, one-of-a-kind backdrop for original artwork in her open kitchen and dining area.

ABOVE RIGHT Green and purple veining in the quartzite countertops inspired the room's eye-catching color palette.

ABOVE The kitchen's open shelving continues the colorful aesthetic, while a framed photograph by Allie adds a personal touch.



PICTURE

Every detail in this eclectic kitchen reflects a story of family, artistry and the community that helped make it possible

BY MORGAN CARTIER WESTON | PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN MICHAEL SIMPSON

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he first thing visitors notice about **Allie Balling's** kitchen isn't the cabinetry or the layout. It's the pair of oversized green chandeliers sparkling above the island and the colorful artwork created by her late sister, Kat McCall. Bold, multifaceted and deeply personal, the room embodies Allie's belief that a home should tell a story.

It's an ideology that has guided her career in creative marketing for years.

When Allie and her husband, **Mark Balling**, moved from Buffalo, New York, to Durham in 2015, she brought with her an established



business, **Alliway Marketing**, but no guarantees; she wasn't sure the relationships and reputation she'd cultivated would translate to a new city.

"I never thought I'd own my own business to begin with," Allie says. "We were successful in Buffalo, but I didn't know if it would transition well with the move." The Bull City quickly proved her doubts wrong.

Alliway carved out a niche working with architects, engineers, builders and other businesses, creating strategic marketing plans, public relations campaigns and branded experiences. As the company grew, so did Allie's appreciation for the community that embraced her and gave her the opportunity to start again.

She has since partnered with clients including the **City of Durham**, **SECU Caring House**, **Moss + Ross** and more. "People took a chance on me," she says. "I get emotional thinking about it. I don't know how to thank everyone."

That gratitude influences how Allie approaches each project. Rather than trying to keep all of Alliway's services in-house, she purposefully contracts with local photographers, writers,

web developers, printers and other creative professionals whenever possible.

"The more I give back, the more I receive," she says. "I want to help other people grow their businesses, so we can all collaborate and thrive."

While Alliway continued to flourish, a devastating loss reshaped Allie's visionary outlook. In September 2024, Hurricane Helene claimed the life of her sister, Kat.



"Kat was a true artist," Allie says. "Being creative has always made me feel close to her."

The loss inspired Allie to pursue an idea she had imagined for years: expanding Alliway beyond marketing and into interior design.

"I've always pictured my company as an alley with different doors leading to different creative services," she says. ►

ABOVE An ornate mirror that once belonged to Allie's parents hangs above the kitchen sink, while brass bar hardware and a cabinet screen add thoughtful finishing touches and a sense of intentionality throughout the room.

LEFT A secret entrance conceals the laundry room and pantry; Benjamin Moore's "Onyx" covers the walls, door and frame, while Ronald Redding's "Bridgewater" wallpaper in Black completes the dramatic look.





The hidden door blends into the gallery wall. Beside it, a live-edge dining table handcrafted by Allie's husband, Mark, raises to bar height for gatherings with friends and family.

After years of working alongside those in the homebuilding industry – combined with a lifelong appreciation for art and thoughtfully designed environments – the transition felt like a natural next step. For Allie, branding and interiors share the same foundation: understanding people and helping them express who they are.

“My mindset moving forward is to continue enhancing people’s lives, businesses and homes through quality service, good design and getting to know them and their needs,” she says.

Her own kitchen became the first expression of that concept. With the assistance of several local partners, Allie transformed the room into a one-of-a-kind gathering place filled with bright colors, layered textures and unexpected touches – a kitchen that feels whimsical, welcoming and, most importantly, distinctly her own.

“I really wanted it to be a statement, something no one else had ever seen,” Allie says.

She intentionally kept the existing footprint to control costs but found thoughtful ways to make the space feel custom. One example is the laundry room door, which she painted black so it disappears into the surrounding gallery wall.

“It has an eclectic and cozy feeling,” she says. “And if we ever get tired of it, we can change it easily.”

Mark also added a personal touch, building the dining table by hand and designing it to adjust to bar height for entertaining. “I work from home and want a sense of welcome and community to be felt here, always,” Allie says. “My home is my sanctuary. A thoughtfully designed home can enhance your life, from how it’s organized to how colors work together.” ►

Marketing and interior design aren't separate disciplines to Allie – they're two sides of the same creative process.

"My marketing background really prepared me for this," she says. "Building a brand and designing a room require the same careful attention to patterns, shapes, typography and, most importantly, how you want people to feel."

More than a decade after arriving in Durham knowing almost no one, Allie says she's still humbled by the support she has received from customers, collaborators,

family and friends. Whether she's developing a brand strategy, creating a nonprofit campaign or designing an interior that reflects a client's personality, her purpose remains unchanged: producing meaningful experiences while giving back to the people who first invested in her.

"My sister always admired what I had built and told me it was amazing," Allie says. "It's hard to express how much gratitude I have – for her, for my family and for this community. I just want to keep paying that forward." 🐾



ABOVE Open shelves showcase the pieces that bring Allie joy, including this playful pair of pink ceramic pups.



LEFT Colorful original artwork creates a striking contrast against the dining area's black walls, reinforcing the eclectic aesthetic.

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