Project Description:
Graylyn, one of the most significant residences of the early 20th century in North Carolina, is a large Norman Revival style mansion. Built for prominent businessman Bowman Gray, the house is faced with yellow stone from Randolph County (Mr. Gray’s home county). The 2 1/2 story house features an irregular slate covered hipped roof with roundheaded dormers and ornamented brick chimneys. The interior was crafted by artisans and craftsmen from across the U.S. and incorporates custom ironwork, hand-painted tile motifs, and incredible paneling and woodwork imported from Europe. Truly opulent for its time, Graylyn was known for its fine details such as the tile work and ironwork throughout the house. The house was listed on the National Register for Historic Places in 1978. The goal for the transformation of Graylyn Manor House’s third floor was to meet modern expectations while keeping with the Manor’s air of historic grandeur. Completed in 1932, the estate became a private hotel for Wake Forest University-affiliated guests in 1972. In 1980, a third floor fire prompted a major renovation that inserted 16 guest rooms into the attic of the historic home. These rooms are tucked into the eaves and make use of the limited number of dormer windows in the slate roof. With the Manor now open to the public, these rooms – substantially unchanged since the 1980 renovation – did not live up to guest expectations.

A near gut and re-organization accommodates 15 re-designed guest rooms and bathrooms. Where possible, brick chimneys were exposed as they would have been exposed in the historic attic. Additional lighting, more open floor layouts, and totally redesigned bathrooms with modern showers and fixtures transformed the floor from bland and outdated to a charming, modern set of well-appointed guest rooms. The bathroom design incorporated references to the house’s existing fine tile work and ironwork. Throughout the project, the design team responded nimbly to the inevitable surprises uncovered as work progressed. The project effectively was a puzzle, with the steeply-pitched roof, plumbing lines, and other existing conditions requiring ingenious solutions. One of the challenges was working with the existing wall-mounted toilet stacks. No new plumbing was allowed to penetrate the historic and occupied second floor rooms, which retain a layout very similar to the era of Mr. and Mrs. Gray. No two rooms have the same layout. Multiple color schemes accentuate this non-standardization and create a residential feel in keeping with the rest of the Manor House. The art takes inspiration from the space’s original use as an attic with cedar closets storing family mementos from trips around the world. Vintage maps, postcards and diary entries from family travel journals recall adventures from a bygone era. Since the property is on the National Register of Historic Places, the designers met throughout with County Historic Resources Commission representatives to ensure an appropriate intervention.

Category: Interiors