

Southern home

until December 25, 2015



486 01696 0



Out of the ashes of a devastating house fire, a remarkable home in the heart of Savannah's Historic District finds new life through a style revival.



HOME AGAIN

TEXT JON DAVID CONOLLEY | PHOTOGRAPHY RICHARD LEO JOHNSON

"PHILOSOPHY" BY HENRIETTA DUBREY, IS THE FOCAL POINT OF THE LIVING ROOM. BRITISH DESIGNER RENA BARCLAY USED A RICHLY HUED LACQUER ON WALLS OF THIS SAVANNAH ABODE FOR "A TIMELESS PAINT EFFECT."



Merely a stone's throw from the banks of the Savannah River, tabby streets and oak trees dripping in silvery Spanish moss offer an almost ethereal stroll to the entrance of Deane Donnigan's charming residence. An early 19th-century build, this home is a staple in the Colonial Gate area; its friendly facade is commonly seen as a backdrop in bridal party photos at the neighborhood square. Now with a warm and inviting air combined with modest elegance and Southern sensibilities, one would never guess tragedy had ever crossed the threshold.

A fire in 2007 caused considerable damage, but enough of the structure endured to make a restoration possible. Deane, who was living abroad at the time, seized the opportunity for change and called on British designer and longtime friend Rena Barclay. They traded ideas and eventually landed on a goal: to maximize contemporary functionality and maintain historical integrity of the Federal period. To help achieve the vision, the ladies looked to Savannah native and residential designer Erik Puljung of Hansen Architects.

Throughout the process, the two communicated with the Georgia firm from their respective homes in England. "The greatest challenge was definitely the distance," says London-based Rena of the 4,000-mile separation. On the ground in Savannah, Erik dug into the details. "That fire helped us change the scope of the project from a renovation into the complete restoration you see today," he says.

Beautiful China Sea Toile window treatments lend pattern and panache to the room. To help make a house a home, Rena says "add something to a room that means something to you. Photographs make a room personable, and a souvenir from a much loved trip makes a space one's own."





Top: Lovely Brunswig & Fils chenille adorns the armchair and pairs well with the Claremont damask on the Louis XV chair, sofa pillows, and Bianca Smith painting over the fireplace. Above: A stylish Fonthill fabric lines the sofa over the backdrop of a beautifully crafted screen, which works perfectly with color and scale. Right: The grass-cloth wallpaper and blue silk fabric of the curtains add interest to the space, as does the Louis XVI-style ottoman from Parc Monceau Antiques. To get a similar look, Rena offers this advice: "Adding a beautiful piece of wood can help give any room life, a sense of longevity, and permanence."

To prevent a bowling alley effect and to create balance in the kitchen, cabinetry and appliances were centered in the space. Leaf plates from Tingewick Pottery in England introduce a unique sense of artistry to the aesthetic, and a pendant light from Vaughan, along with fabric by Galbraith & Paul, complete the look.



Left: The mirror-mounted faucet and vessel sink add a modern and eclectic flare, suggesting a hint of European practicality. "Minimalistic but functional," quips Rena. "I love mixing classical features with contemporary up-to-date fixtures." Right: A custom-designed inlay stone floor with two types of water jet-cut stones defines the style in the bathroom. Below: A garden level eat-in kitchen serves the guest floor and doubles as a bar for entertaining. Most of the basics in this space were salvaged after the fire—the slate flooring and brick only needed a good cleaning.



In the early stages of research, Erik discovered several critical errors had been made during a previous renovation in the 1960s that he and Deane were determined to correct. Erik notes that proportion, in everything from the trim to the window length, is one of the most critical components in a successful Southern home restoration, and he made it his mission to bring back that historical accuracy. Once the framework was complete, Rena's vision for this Deep South dwelling began to take shape. She says, "Southern style means kindness, generosity, wonderful hospitality, elegance, refined taste. Intuitively, it's a way of life, making someone feel comfortable and at ease." And those sensibilities shine through in the designs. The home's library is one remarkable blend of old and new. Its handsome chocolate brown-lacquered walls set a contemporary tone, yet give the room an air of Southern gentility.

Deane believes the professionals and craftsmen involved in the restoration got everything right. "Friends from London have traveled over to visit me or to tour the Lowcountry, and that has been lots of fun, especially since their English history is a very integral part of the Savannah story, both past and present."

Hospitality abounds here. As guests lay their heads down to sleep, it's as though the cicadas' gentle whispers are saying, out of these ashes, the South, Savannah, and the Donnigan home have indeed risen again.





The Cowtan & Tout wallpaper adds a feminine touch to the bedroom and complements the period of the home. Curtains made with damask fabric by Colefax and Fowler layer the look and lend a sumptuous, refined note to the space.

