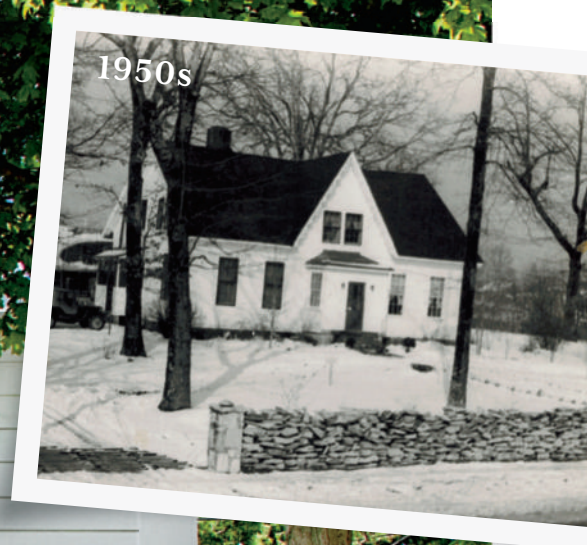


That Old Monteagle Magic

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The "window" that underscores this house's Gothic charm is actually a repurposed mirror found at an antiques shop in Nashville.

AT THIS TENNESSEE
MOUNTAIN HOME,
WEEKENDS ARE
BLESSEDLY SLOW



Terry Banta first fell in love with Monteagle, Tennessee, as a college girl.

She'd escape to "the mountain," located about 90 miles southeast of Nashville and perched atop the Cumberland Plateau, on weekends with her Vanderbilt University sorority sisters who had grown up summering in the famous Monteagle Sunday School Assembly cottages. In the nineties, Terry and her husband, Robert, returned with their two daughters for family vacations. And then when their daughter Caroline started college at Sewanee, about 5 miles down the road from Monteagle, they'd rent cottages during parents' weekends. No matter how much time passed, the mountain kept tugging them back.

So in 2005, when the Atlanta-based couple spotted a charming Carpenter Gothic-style cottage for sale, they acted fast. Well, as fast as life in Monteagle would allow. "There's a different sense of time and place here, which is one of the reasons we love it," says Terry. Nestled in the heart of the town (population about 1,200), the nearly 3,000-square-foot home "felt familiar, welcoming, and serene," she says. There's an elementary school across the street, and a picturesque white country church—steeple and all—sits next door. On holidays, the Bantas camp out on their front porch to watch parades and stargaze. Up here, so many twinkly lights are visible that the sky takes on a fairyland look.

It's easy to imagine that little has changed here in decades. Built around 1890, the home was owned by a country doctor known for growing strawberries that neighborhood children would pick on their way to and from school. Dr. William A. "Doc" Brewer's home was also the local hospital, with a second floor broken into small rooms for treating patients and delivering babies—including the Bantas' next-door neighbor's mother. When Terry and Robert bought the home, they inherited its stories and the cramped warren of treatment rooms. "People would ask me how many bedrooms it had, and I'd have to say, 'I'm really not sure!'" Terry recalls.

Old green wicker porch furniture "just kind of goes," says the home's designer. The house and the church next door were both built around 1890.



"We restored this Swedish Mora clock. If it's going to be in the heart of the home, it has to tick."

—TERRY BANTA





“There’s not one thing that feels contrived about this house. It’s relaxed and natural.”
—TERRY BANTA



The all-white, open kitchen is outfitted with limestone countertops, brass fittings, and antique radios that belonged to the homeowners’ grandmothers.

To update the house while keeping its old-house soul, they turned to Rachel Halvorson, a Nashville designer with a knack for creative renovations (who happens to be a friend of their daughter Caroline). On Halvorson’s first visit, she saw a brighter future for the home. “I just quit talking because I didn’t need to. She just got it,” says Terry. “She was so clear about what the vision should be.”

Over the next four years, they worked meticulously to do the structure justice, stripping it down to the studs while retaining the home’s wood floors and massive windows. “The way that light comes through the old glass is just magical,” Halvorson says. “It’s sparkly and just has a different feel to it.” Stanley Dixon, an architect friend who had married his wife on a Sewanee mountaintop, sketched out a sprawling front porch that looks as if it has been there since the beginning. And when Halvorson spotted an antique mirror that was perfectly shaped for the second floor, she convert-

ed it into a window that you’d swear was original.

A chipped Victorian front door set the tone for the decor inside. A neutral color palette unified the newly exposed spaces, while rich textures—wood-paneled walls, beaded-board ceilings—layered on character and warmth. “We just went with the fact that the house was old and quirky,” says Halvorson. “So when beaded board didn’t line up exactly, we let it go.” They avoided clichéd country decorating tropes—a farmhouse sink, rooster knickknacks—in favor of fresh, cottagey decor. Now that the interior is in tip-top shape, they can focus on the open, sunny acre behind the house where they plan to replant old Doc Brewer’s strawberry patch.



"You need a big landing to balance out little bedrooms," says Halvorson. Here, they vaulted the ceiling and clad it with board-and-batten.

RENOVATION LESSONS FROM AN OLD HOUSE

1

DO YOUR HOMEWORK

Study structures that were built in the same era and area for inspiration. During construction, Terry picked up *The Architecture of Country Houses* by A.J. Downing for a proper education in gingerbread trim, columns, and cornices.

2

MAINTAIN THE AUTHENTICITY

For a cohesive look, choose period-appropriate materials and finishes that don't look out of place. The Bantas added a front porch that fit right in, and Halvorson salvaged the front door from a Victorian home in McMinnville, Tennessee. "We didn't alter it at all. It's like it was meant to be," says Terry.

3

EMBRACE THE "LESS IS MORE" PHILOSOPHY

Drawing from the neutral hues found in the family room's stone walls, Halvorson adopted a single color palette that let her mix textures to her heart's content. To keep the aesthetic truly airy, she suggests incorporating fewer pieces of furniture.



4

SHOW OFF YOUR FAMILY'S STORY

The Bantas dusted off pieces they hadn't used in years—their grandmothers' radios, a chest made by Robert's uncle, their kids' toddler beds—and put them on permanent display. "Almost everything has a story," says Terry. "There were few things we had to purchase."

5

PICK PATTERNS THAT PLAY UP THE SPIRIT OF THE HOUSE

Assorted calico and checked patterns are a nod to the past yet feel completely contemporary in here. Just follow Halvorson's lead by tempering them with classic cottage white, and you can't go wrong.

6

MAKE THINGS EASY BREEZY FOR GUESTS

"Friends use our home, so I wanted everything to be simple to find and grab," says Terry. In the kitchen, open shelves stylishly store dishes and glassware along one wall, while ledges surrounding the stove put pancake mix at arm's reach.

7

GET SMART WITH YOUR SPACE

When a bedroom's teeny size presented a design challenge, Halvorson filled it with an old toddler bed just right for the Bantas' youngest guests. The same was true for a tiny bath that she outfitted with convenient corner shelves.