

# COUNTRY *RETREAT*

Interior Design by Libby Rush, Bittners  
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# LIVING THE AMERICAN SPIRIT

A Louisville woman who fell in love with the Old West from vacationing at dude ranches for several years has made her fantasy come true – by moving east.

She knew she wanted land, lots of land, under starry skies above, for the horses she wanted to ride and all the dogs she’s constantly rescuing.

So she bought a large plot of land in Eminence, Ky., about 45 minutes from her suburban Louisville home, due east in Henry County. Before she began to think of it as a residence, she set it up as a horse farm, building a tack room, feeding shed and indoor riding.

She’d go out there on Saturdays or Sundays to tend her growing herd of riding horses, making sure they were groomed and fed, and bringing her many rescue dogs with her. She fell in love with the area and so did the dogs.

So, if she were going to spend extended time there – entire weekends, or maybe entire weeks, even months – she needed a suitable place to live. With the sheds already investing the woodsy, horsey quality of the place, she enlisted architect Craig Rushing of Lexington and designer Libby Rush of Bittners to interpret what she kind of thought she knew she wanted.

It started out vague, but it quickly sharpened into focus.

“She came to me with pictures she’d cut out from issues of Cowboy Magazine and American Cowboy,” says Rush, who is Bittners’ vice president of residential design and who had worked with the homeowner on several of her Louisville residences. “I like when clients do that. It gives me an insight into their wants and needs.”

They decided they wanted an authentic weathered look from the Great Plains, and started shopping, beginning with Longwood Antique Woods of Lexington, which is in the business of sourcing reclaimed and recycled lumber for floors, doors, bars, beams, furniture, etc.

“We found a couple of long, notched roof beams, and that pretty much set the architectural style for the rest of the house,” said Rush. “Longwood also provided the reclaimed wood for the floors.”

Through Longwood Antique Woods, they also found Lexington architect Craig Rushing, who created the ranch house with its open floorplan, loft bedroom and a vaulted ceiling more than 20 feet high.

In the process, said Rush, they also invented the lifestyle to go with the home: a weekend retreat that could also be comfortably lived in full-time if necessary, could accommodate large family gatherings, would be livable for her brood of 12 or 13 rescue dogs (and constantly growing) and would reflect the country Western ambience the homeowner had grown to love.

It would also be a responsible approach to sourcing local materials and reclaimed lumber. And to that end, four key members joined the party: local woodworkers Roger Gaddie and Allen Dancer and local stonemasons, father and son Jody and Brennan Edgerton.

Using fallen cypress and oak trees on the property, Gaddie and Dancer made all the handrailing on the stairs, the stair treads, the cabinet facings in the kitchen and a nontraditional four-poster bed in the master bedroom. And using stones that had been dumped on the property, the Edgertons hand-cut the dramatic full-height stone fireplace in the living room plus a similar one on a porch outside of the building.

It was here that Libby Rush took Craig Rushing’s architecture and created the style and feel of the home – what she calls “casual but sophisticated Western chic.”

“This is strictly a blue jeans and flannel shirt kind of atmosphere,” Rush said. “It was never intended to be fancy. But that never means that it can’t be put together with a great deal of taste.”

The first challenge was separating the large, open, loft-like main level of the living quarters into smaller, dedicated lifestyle spaces. With the staircase to the upstairs loft cutting the space in half, visitors enter into the kitchen and dining side of the house.

The small but workable kitchen has the same raw wood cabinetry as in so much of the rest of the house, though not so rustic that modern appliances can’t produce a Thanksgiving dinner for 20 people.

A long rectangular wood bar lined with rustic wood bar stools, with Southwestern-patterned seat covers, handles the morning coffee and informal lunches.

Then, along the same side of the house, is an area devoted to more formal dining and conversation. A soft, light-colored loveseat with orange horsehead throw pillows faces the enormous stone fireplace. There’s also a variety of seating here, under a large and dramatic antler chandelier. Furniture covers are muted so that the various accessories – like pillows, throws and an Oriental rug – pop with bright colors.

Off to the side is the more formal dining table, surrounded by chairs with pony hide seat backs.

The other side of the house is what one might call the living room, which has a comfortable arrangement of leather sofa and club chairs surrounding an ottoman with a pony hide top. There are more of the earth-tone pillows, throws and seat covers around the room plus a great many Old Western artifacts.

A saddle hangs on the wall, on one side of a rich wooden armoire that had been in the homeowner’s family. On the other side is a pair of riding chaps affixed to the wall. And the adjoin-













ing wall displays a large horsehide rug.

Native American statuary occupies many of the horizontal surfaces while Western-themed artwork is scattered on the walls.

And oh, those walls! While the walls on the rest of the house are mostly painted, the walls in this corner have wallpaper in a large brick pattern that looks like tobacco cloth, leathered and aged.

"I got it from Cannon & Bullock in Washington State," said Rush. "It adds a lot of warmth and texture to the space."


Running up the middle of the space is the staircase to the two loft bedrooms. The staircase was made by the local woodworkers, Gaddie and Dancer, using available reclaimed cypress wood. The railings and spindles were created with these individual pieces of uneven branches, gnarls and curves included. They were sanded and put in place for a natural, authentic look and feel the way cowpokes of the 1880s might have created their living spaces.

More reclaimed lumber from Longwood Antique Woods was used for the loft's support beams.

The stairs branch at the top to the two loft bedrooms up there. The master bedroom has a four-poster bed made from the same unmilled cypress sticks as on the stair rail. Rush has designed the room with the same type of Western references as downstairs: a painting of horses over the bed, 10-gallon hats and pillows with steer heads and another horsehide rug on the floor. Again, almost everything is earth-toned and Southwestern. And a door leads out to a porch above the patio, from which the homeowner can overlook and survey her property.

In the guest bedroom, the woodworkers used the cypress branches again to make a bunk bed, for what would an Old Western bunkhouse be without bunk beds? There's even a handmade ladder leading to the upper bunk.

What started out as just a "place to live" became a Western showplace. But Rush said they weren't trying to create a Western-looking space that would make good photography in the home magazines, they were trying to create a residence that would appeal to the homeowner as she spent more and more time there.

"I was after what was going to look right," the designer said. "How's it going to feel? And how's it going to live?" 









Libby Rush, Bittners









