



TWO LEGENDS *Come Together*

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HERMITAGE & BITTNER'S

A Tribute to Kentucky

Hermitage Farm, a famous 1835 farmhouse in Oldham County, has been a Kentucky legacy for nearly two centuries. The house, a red brick Colonial behind a stone fence and iron gate, features architecture steeped in the period of its birth. Its white trim and two symmetrical porches add that southern charm for welcoming guests inside.

Its long hallways and curving staircases were trod on by generations of Kentucky colonels, farmers and horse breeders. For nearly 60 years, it was the property of Warner and Harriet Jones, the only breeders to produce winners of the Kentucky Derby (Dark Star, 1953), Kentucky Oaks (Nancy Junior, 1967), and a Breeders' Cup race (Is It True, 1988). Jones was also chairman of Churchill Downs from 1984-1992, until ill health forced him to step down. He died in 1994, at which time his widow sold the farm to Carl Pollard, former chairman of Churchill from 2001-2011.

In other words, this is a property that's part of the Kentucky cultural fabric, its bluegrass having fed racing thoroughbreds for 80 years.

Hermitage Farm's current owners, Laura Lee Brown and Steve Wilson, continue to honor the farm's remarkable equine tradition as they expand the vision of the farm's previous owners.

Brown and Wilson are well known as the creative power behind, and owners of, the famous 21c Museum Hotels. They are contemporary art collectors and preservationists, committed to bringing works of art to the public through innovative exhibits and programs which integrate art into daily life.

What makes Brown and Wilson so unique is their genuine interest in historic preservation. In fact, they bought Hermitage Farm in 2010 primarily to keep it out of the hands of developers. Their love of the land and its heritage have kept this beautiful farm alive and thriving today.

"It has long been a dream of ours that Hermitage Farm remain the same beautiful, open, green space that it is today," Wilson said at the time of the purchase. "We want to ensure the property remains pastoral but also continues to be regarded as a site for world-class equine operations."

Up the road, in Goshen, is another unique and beautiful

property called Woodland Farm, owned by Brown and Wilson. This genuine working farm is home to many heritage breeds of livestock, including American Buffalo, and has several large gardens that use sustainable best practices.

Hermitage was renovated for Brown and Wilson to be rented out for corporate retreats, weddings, meetings, parties, and even weekend stay overs, while keeping its historic lore. It also became a unique place to exhibit their collection of contemporary art.

To put all these pieces of the dream together, they turned to another century-old Kentucky treasure, Bittner's, a nationally-recognized design firm, which last year celebrated its 160th year in business.

"I loved working with Douglas on Hermitage. I've admired his work for a very long time in the homes of mutual friends. What he did was perfect for the task of reinterpreting 21c's style into a 19th century house."

-Steve Wilson, 21c Museum Hotel

"Their vision, the inspiration behind the design, was to create a gallery for their rotating collection of art," said Bittner's President and COO, Douglas Riddle. "In that respect, it was taking the focus off of traditional interior design, and focusing instead solely on the art."

But art that would be constantly changing. "So we couldn't build our interiors around the art. We had to design a space that would not get in the way of the art, would not contradict the art, and would stand by itself as its own great work of residential design."













“Douglas has a way of creating the right solution for problem areas, and he knew we didn’t want to spend a fortune redoing Hermitage. He helped us save cabinetry and hardware that was still usable. He designed for function rather than vogue,” Wilson stated.

Riddle started with the all-important palette for the house. He chose elegant whites and creams, so that nothing – interesting artwork, nor colorfully patterned furniture – would be out of place.

In the best designs, decisions are made that reflect the culture of the surroundings. And in the best designs, those references are not shouted, but are softly whispered, subtle indications of their connection with the environment.

Riddle, who said he fell in love with the beauty of the property, tried to reference all the farm’s touch points. He paid homage to the farm’s famous black and red barn doors, and black four-board horse fences, with re-creations in black tables. Wrought iron chair frames and chandeliers, and all of the iron and rattan furniture in the bright and open sun room at the rear of the house are also in dialogue with the property.

“I was so excited when Steve asked me to work with him on Hermitage because he is a creative genius. With his and Laura Lee’s foresight, they saw that it would be a perfect marriage between two legends, Hermitage and Bittners. They allow your creativity to soar!”

-Douglas Riddle, Bittners

In the living room are a pair of modern, black and chrome Wassily chairs designed by Marcel Breuer, juxtaposed with traditional linen sofas, vintage Indian tapestry pillows, a Greek key silk velvet ottoman, and a unique antelope wool rug.

Earth-tone flooring, reflecting the beauty of the land, is used throughout the house and up the staircase, though not in the large formal entryway “because that floor is so spectacular,” Riddle said. All the original wood floors were repaired, but the natural patina was preserved.

A rich brown leather sofa in the library reminded Riddle of leather saddles, inspired by another icon of history and style, Hermès, which began life as a French harness and saddle maker at about the same exact time Hermitage Farm was built.

Nailhead trim on the sofa was inspired by the elaborate

nailhead design on Wilson’s favorite saddle, which is displayed on a stand in the house.

In front of the sofa is a custom-made genuine shearling ottoman. The sofa is accompanied on either end by brass floor lamps that have modern lines but an antique feel. Above the sofa hangs “Lucas/Rug,” a colorful, abstract silk rug, one of a series of portraits Chuck Close created of fellow artist Lucas Samaras.

Colors were critical to Bittners’ interpretation of the vernacular. The red trim on the barn doors is repeated in touches of red throughout the house including a red flannel throw pillow.

Green, emulating the acres of pastures and rolling hills, is incorporated into the upholstery, pillows and plants. “Laura Lee is an avid gardener,” Riddle said, “so bringing in the green brings the calm pastoral quality of the surrounding farmland into the house.”

All the ceilings in the house are painted a very pale blue, the color of the porch roofs used at the time to dissuade birds from building nests there by making them think it was sky.

Pale gray painted floors on the outside porches, which Riddle says was a popular color in country houses of the 19th century, are brought inside to the dining room by using a similar color stone flooring.

The dining room features a Bittners’ custom, 22-foot-long dining room table created from wood right off the Hermitage farm, and handcrafted by their talented master craftsmen, using old-world craftsmanship techniques. The rugged, scarred planks, stamped with the Bittners brand, are fastened together with traditional bow tie keys, which are usually made from wood in order to disappear inside the grain. In a twist, these keys are made of hand-hammered iron to stand out and to reinforce the natural, industrial feel of the table.

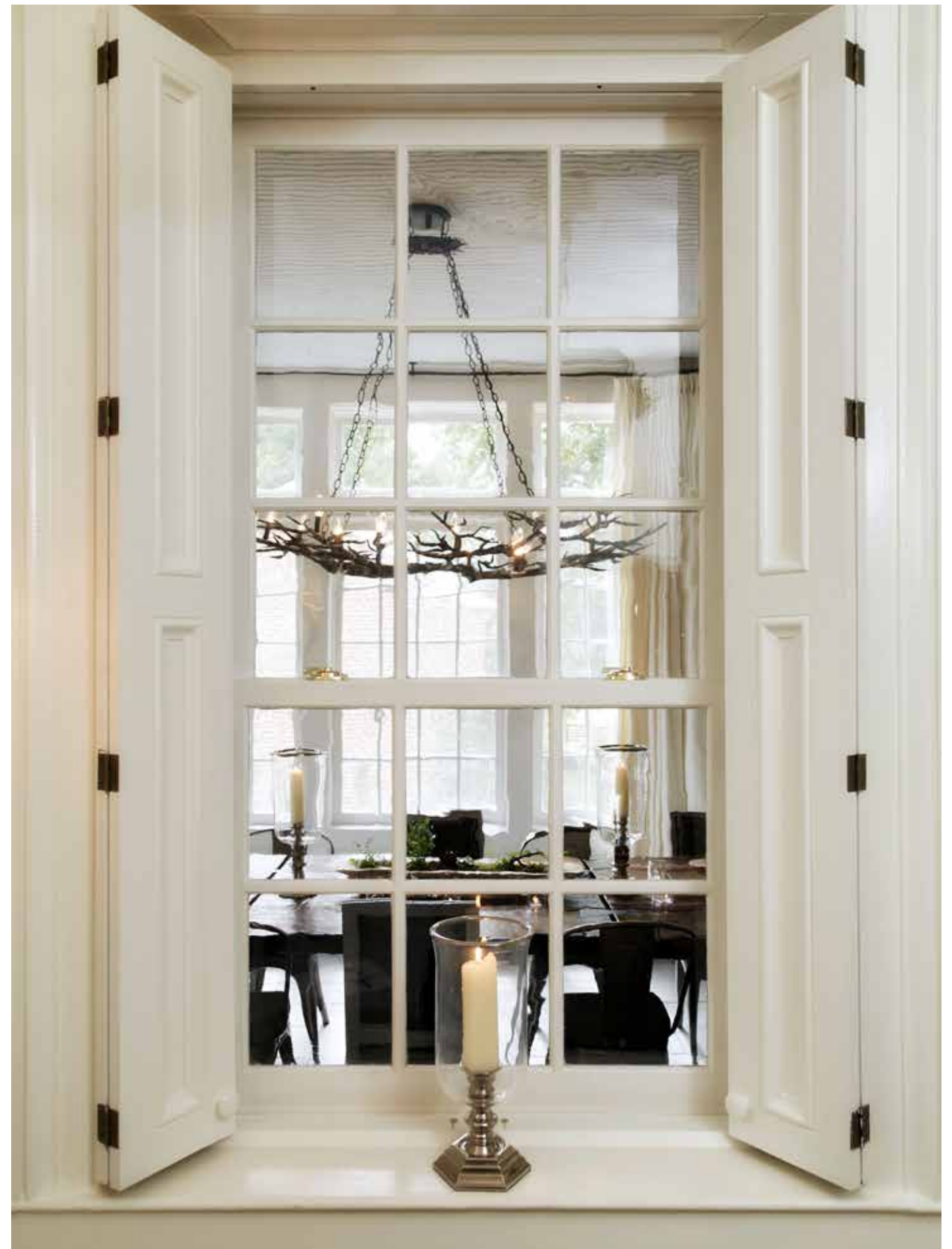
14 dining chairs complementing the table are a combination of modern galvanized chairs, meant to reference the galvanized feed buckets around the horse farm, alternating with traditional gray leather dining chairs that match the stone tile floors.

Above the table is a chandelier made of hand-hammered bronze “branches” that allude to the farm’s acres of trees.

The room is surrounded by three walls of white frame pane windows, treated with the cream-colored linen draperies found throughout the house – especially in the second-floor bedrooms.

Those rooms are all cozy and traditional, but with Bittners’ take on “traditional.” The rods holding the linen draperies were painted the same cream-colored hue to make them disappear into the elegant white linen wallcovering, letting the beautiful texture of the wallpaper and the draperies emerge.

“The rooms are large and the ceilings tall, so the wallcovering softens the scale of the rooms and keeps them warm and comfortable,” Riddle said.







Also, Riddle said, “we always kept in mind that we wanted the home to be a nod to the farm’s history, but in a modern-day world, with modern fabrics and furnishings.”

So instead of a four-poster bed, Bittners built a traditional headboard but exaggerated it so it goes all the way up to the molding. “Traditional in shape, modern in design,” Riddle noted.

In another all-cream bedroom, Bittners accessorized a traditional fireplace with a plush white linen club chair, a stool made from steamed white oak strips and Wilson’s own riding boots (he competes in the combined driving competition at his annual Hermitage Classic), under an ultra-modern photograph on steel by artist Letitia Quesenberry, a multidisciplinary local artist well-known for her large-scale drawings, photographs, light boxes, videos and text-based installations.

Several yards away from the main house is a small square red-brick building that served as the smokehouse. It has been turned into a comfortable and cozy guest house. From a design standpoint, it retains all the cues and references of the main house. That means many of the timbers used to hang the smoked meats have been kept as decorative beams. The stone walls were painted while leaving the beauty of their irregularities caused by the smoking process from its past.

The furniture is a modern take on traditional cottage furniture: a red leather sofa, a steel coffee table, pillows and fabrics in

zebra stripes, leopard skin and polka dots, and a muted Greek key pattern rug. A bison head on the wall over the sofa came from Woodland Farm.

Wilson reflected on Riddle’s final design, “I know what he did for Hermitage is not what he would put in his own house and it’s not what he would suggest for my own living space. But it was perfect for the task of reinterpreting 21c’s style into a 19th century house.” He continued, “It’s more important to Douglas that his work be comfortable, beautiful and discreet than to ‘guild a lily.’”

When Bittners completed the project in 2013, Brown and Wilson hosted a charitable event at the property called “Two Legends Come Together,” to benefit the Kentucky School of Art and also Oldham Ahead, a non-profit “to enhance Oldham County’s natural and cultural resources, while working to sustain its equine, agricultural and commercial base.”

“Both charities are very close to Laura Lee’s and Steve’s hearts,” Riddle said. “We were thrilled to be a part of this event and for it to be Bittners’ first-ever show-house.”

The event included cocktails on the front lawn, seated dinner in a tent and a tour of the house. “We expected about 150 people,” Riddle said. “Instead, we had 550. Everybody responded.”

What a great tribute to Kentucky, where two legends – a 180-year-old horse farm and a 160-year-old design firm – came together! 