

How the West is Done

Interior Designer Libby Rush lends cowgirl flair to a unique horse country retreat

Written by Bridget Williams

Photography by Andrew Kung



Built from reclaimed barn wood, the combination home, stables and indoor riding arena are the centerpiece of the 110-acre property.

Inspired by a request from her children to acquire a piece of farmland, this homeowner traversed rural horse country for over a year before settling on a 110-acre property with little more than a 100-year-old farmhouse and tobacco barn. “I really bought it without any specific plans in mind,” she admits.

The impetus for what was to become her favorite retreat was a trip to a traditional Western dude ranch. Having little experience with horses, she had set a goal of just becoming comfortable on horseback, beginning with English riding lessons, which she enjoyed but found somewhat restrictive. “At the dude ranch we just saddled up and rode to our hearts content; it was such an amazing experience,” she recalled with enthusiasm.

Acquiring her own farm allowed the homeowner to further indulge her passion by increasing the number of Canadian Sport horses under her tutelage, including a trio of weanlings. “The joy of raising them has been second only to having my own children,” she said, adding that the horses’

mannerisms sometimes mirror that of her handsome German Shepherds that always seem to be underfoot. As her stable grew, the homeowner commissioned the construction of a new barn with stalls, a lighted indoor ring and covered area for hay storage. Made using wood salvaged from old barns, the structure, set far from the road in the rolling landscape, appears as rooted to the land as the old tobacco barn.

Finding herself spending more and more time at the property, the homeowner originally intended on carving out a studio-style apartment within the barn, so she called in long-time collaborator, interior designer Libby Rush of Bittners, to help brainstorm. “Before I brought Libby on board I was literally flying by the seat of my pants,” said the homeowner. The duo joke that the project evolved rather organically, with architect Craig Rushing of Rc3 in Lexington providing the framework for what was to become a comfortable two-bedroom, three-bath home within the existing barn.

An ornately carved front door, crafted by Roger Daines of Auburn, Alabama, opens to the double-height living area, a single open space comprised of a kitchen, dining area and two distinct seating areas.





Individual pieces of rock that comprise the fireplace were painstakingly chipped away by Jody and Brennan Edgerton, fifth and sixth generation master stonemasons, until they were the desired size.

“We are able to secure a great team of artisans who helped to define the look and who all took so much pride in their craftsmanship,” said Rush. Heavily influenced by her love of Western-style riding, the rustic interiors, defined by the use of varied reclaimed woods, stone and leather, are accented by the rich colors and textures of the American West. A covered terrace with a stacked stone fireplace to the left of the front door is one of the few indications that this working barn is also a home.

An ornately carved front door, crafted by Roger Daines of Auburn, Alabama, opens to the double-height living area, a single open space comprised of a kitchen, dining area and two distinct seating areas: one adjacent to the dining area and grouped in front of a fireplace, the other on the opposite side of the cypress staircase. Longwood Antique Woods supplied materials for the flooring and some of the ceiling beams, including a large notched one used on the fireplace wall. “It was like putting a puzzle together,” said Rush. “We’d find pieces and then figure out how to make them work.”

Lisa Hamilton of Miller’s Fancy Bath & Kitchen designed the compact galley-style kitchen. Carpenter Roger Gaddie and Allen Daneir fashioned cabinet door fronts from reclaimed wood and Hamilton chose substantial turned iron handles to complete the look. The range hood over the Wolf six-burner cooktop is adorned with decorative tile from Louisville Tile.

Exquisite examples of stonework abound and are the handiwork of Jody and Brennan Edgerton, fifth and sixth generation master stonemasons. Individual pieces of rock that comprise the fireplace were painstakingly chipped away until they were the desired size. The homeowner recounted how Jody told her “these rocks speak to me” and even fashioned one of the stones to resemble a cowboy boot. Rush joked that, “There was a lot of effort put into making everything look effortlessly rustic.” Rush selected furnishings that were classic, comfortable and that could stand up to the wear and tear of farm life. “I don’t worry about everything having to be too perfect,” said the homeowner.

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In the larger of two seating areas, individual pieces of deckled-edge paper applied to the walls in a running bond pattern resemble the color of tanned and weathered leather. A pair of leather chaps purchased in Wyoming displayed on one wall date to the 1800s.





Roger Gaddie crafted the rustic four-poster bed in the master bedroom. The homeowner gave him a rough idea of what she wanted, using various magazine clippings she had collected as a guide.





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Individual pieces of deckled-edge paper applied to the walls surrounding the larger of two seating areas in a running bond pattern resemble the color of tanned and weathered leather. Hanging on the wall are a pair of leather chaps and a saddle, both dating to the 1800s that were purchased in Wyoming. A cowhide tacked to the wall is one of many used in varying ways throughout the first floor living spaces.

An arched door off of the seating area leads to a “sitting room” of equestrian bent – one full of Western saddles and illuminated by a wagon-wheel chandelier. From here one can access the riding area, the stables or the covered area where the horses gather for their feed. Red is the homeowner’s favorite color, expressed to varying degrees in the home and via the vibrant stall doors sourced by Longwood Antique Woods from Hamburg Place. An ardent animal lover, deluxe kennels and runs provide comfortable confines for her pack of furry friends as well as a rotating cast of characters she graciously fosters on a continuing basis for the local no-kill animal shelter. She relishes in daily walks on the property

with as many as ten canines in tow. “Having this place has really curbed my wanderlust,” she added.

Stone caps are found on the newel posts of the striking staircase, the treads of which were fashioned from an oak tree on property that needed to be felled. Cedar beams with their bark intact are found at the base of the stairs and outside supporting the ceiling of the covered porch.

Soaring ceilings are found in both of the second floor bedrooms, located at either side of the split stairs. Roger Gaddie crafted large vertical louvers out of wood sourced from the property for an opening in the master bedroom that looks over the first floor living area. He also built the rustic four-poster bed in the master and a truly unique bunk bed in the guest suite. The homeowner gave him a rough idea of what she wanted, using various magazine clippings she had collected as a guide. “I just let him run with his ideas and I was never disappointed with the results,” she added.

“This home reflects {the homeowner’s} true personality. I admire her for following her passion,” said Rush. “I always say a project is a success when you make someone happy in their element.” 