



Perfect CARRIAGE

Interior Design, Amy Cimba, Bittners
Writer, Steve Kaufman
Photographer, Robert Burge



A CARRIAGE RIDE OF ELEGANCE

There was a time when carriage houses were more than just apartments carved out above a garage. They were built to hold actual carriages and the horses that pulled them, and later to accommodate a fleet of Packards, Pierce-Arrows and Broughams for the best families.

And so they were substantial, with architectural elements almost as extensive as the main house itself.

One of those early 20th century carriage houses remains today as a family's living quarters in the Altagate neighborhood. It's a magnificent array of red brick architecture by John Bacon Hutchings, combining Romanesque, Byzantine, Tudor, Colonial, Revival and Arts and Crafts styles. It was built almost 100 years ago for Matthew Love Akers, the prominent railroad executive and president of the Louisville Soap Co., and his wife Frank Guthrie Akers.

But after the carriage house was built, and before the main house was even begun, the Akers sold the property and moved into the Seelbach Hotel until their deaths.

When Bittners designer Amy Cimba was hired to redecorate the living space for its current owner, she was blown away by the gorgeous period architecture – who wouldn't be? – but saw the challenges.

"Everything was very heavy," she says. "There are brick floors and walls, and solid molding and beams. While we didn't want to touch these period elements, we also needed to make the space warmer and more comfortable and bring down the scale somewhat."

Perhaps most challenging was the largest space in the house, the old carriage room that is now a 500-square-foot kitchen and dining room. While it dominated the living space, it needed to become more functional, offering both intimate moments when the family was home alone and elaborate elegance when the family was entertaining.

Cimba created layers to warm up the space, placing sisal and Oriental rugs onto the brick floors, and setting a highly polished wood dining table under a leather and brass chandelier with equestrian references. (Some of the brass fittings are in the shape of stirrups.)

The table can be reduced in size, for cocktail and entertain-

ing, or expanded with the insertion of leaves for large dinner parties. Also, Cimba placed furniture settings around the room to add multiple conversation groupings.

A hearth room off the kitchen was fitted with simple, clean green leather chairs and an ivory sofa. The arched windows framed in green wood molding make the room an elegant but comfortable hangout space for the family.

"The canvas was already extremely interesting," Cimba says, "so we were very thoughtful about each element we added. We wanted it all to be complementary and even quiet, not complicated or overwhelming."

Bringing down the scale was particularly necessary in the front entryway, a tall, brick-floored space with an enormous sliding wooden barn door off to one side. The brick and wood created a cold, lumbering feel to what should be a warm and inviting place.

Cimba placed a center hall table with a zebra skin top inside the room and, on top of that, a big antique green candle lantern.

"Coming into a home with candlelight is always enticing," she says.

Through that room and down the long narrow hall leading into the dining room are spectacular sightlines that, Cimba says, "make you feel like you're in the treetops." The tall arched leaded windows face out onto the terrace, some beautiful stone work, a fountain and the surrounding trees.

Cimba selected furniture that would soften the hard architectural surfaces of brick, stone and wood without having to battle them. She chose a navy velvet sofa with clean, classic lines and woven and leather fabrics that are complex in textures and colors, but not in patterns. "There's so much visual interest in the architecture of the house, we tried to keep everything else quiet, luxurious and timeless. It's designed for longevity, not for trendiness."

The overall effect is a 1913 building converted for a 2013 lifestyle. "There are so many textures and layers and such richness of color," says the designer, "that when the gorgeous sunlight pours through the big windows, it's a magical space." ▼







