

RANCH DRESSING

For more than a decade, interior designer Libby Rush of Bittners has helped guide the transformation of a modest rural retreat into a gracious and spacious family home.

Written by Bridget Cottrell / Photos by Kate Leichhart

"I wanted to be able to smell the horses; it's perfume to me," said the wife regarding how she envisioned her home at Rocket Run Ranch, the centerpiece of which is a barn/house hybrid that has gradually morphed from a weekend retreat to a year-round residence. When she acquired the 100+-acre rural property, complete with a weathered tobacco barn, she said she didn't have concrete plans in mind. Her vision started coming into focus following a trip to a traditional Western dude ranch, which ignited a passion for Canadian Sport horses and a whole-hearted embrace of cowgirl style.

First featured on these pages in 2013, since that time, a marriage to someone who shares her passion and happily accepts the mantle of being the "dude" at the ranch; a gift of Texas Longhorn cattle; and welcoming grandchildren and more than a dozen rescue dogs over the years are a few of the life changes that prompted renovations and additions to this rustic-chic retreat.

The interiors, carried out by Libby Rush of Bittners in collaboration with Stonehenge Construction, unabashedly and unwaveringly cater to the couple's Western-centric passions.

"Before I brought Libby on board, I was literally flying by the seat of my pants," said the homeowner in a 2012 *Sophisticated Living* story. The original modest barn-style home was designed by architect Craig Rushing of RC3 in Lexington. As the original footprint has expanded with the addition of a new primary bedroom wing and, most recently, a kitchen extension, the rustic interiors remain characterized using varied reclaimed woods, stone, and leather, and are complemented by the rich colors and textures of the American West.

An ornately carved front door, crafted by Roger Daines of Auburn, Alabama, opens to the double-height living area, which is divided by a log staircase. Before the most recent renovation, the kitchen was located just inside the front door; the new and improved version is a spacious and one-of-a-kind, with artisan-inspired touches and a vaulted ceiling with decorative beams. A picture window provides an unobstructed view of a meadow where a granite headstone marks the final resting place of "Doc," the wife's beloved rodeo horse.



Interior designer Libby Rush worked closely with M&H Cabinets to create the bespoke kitchen cabinetry. Rockerbuilt is credited with the oversized range hood, and the floor tile and artisan-made mosaic tile on the backsplash were sourced through Louisville Tile.

A custom silk rug from Rug & Kilm anchors the room seating area. The lines of the custom table and chairs in the Marcel Breuer Wassily style are positioned in the dining area. Resting on the table are two vintage French ceramic vases. The dining chairs have custom-made seat cushions.



An arched stone opening, crafted from the same materials as the nearby dual-sided fireplace, separates the living room from the kitchen. A beautiful live edge bar top salvaged from the old kitchen was repurposed by the Bittners' woodworking shop into the top for a custom credenza.



A secondary dining area in the former kitchen space is defined by chairs with tooled leather seats, reminiscent of a fine Western saddle.



As part of the most recent renovations, several upholstered pieces in the living area were refreshed, and a new custom rug from Anabel's was selected to anchor the seating area in front of the fireplace.

Everything in the home blurs the line between new and old, adding instant antiquity and making new renovations indiscernible from the original structure. An arched stone opening, crafted from the same materials as the nearby dual-sided fireplace, separates the living room from the kitchen. Inspired by something she saw on a trip to San Miguel, Rush commissioned a trio of hammered copper pendant lights suspended above the island. Rush worked closely with M&H Cabinets to create "an interesting integration of finishes" on the kitchen cabinetry. Rockerbuilt is credited with the oversized range hood, and the floor tile and artisan-made mosaic tile on the backsplash were sourced through Louisville Tile.



Phil and Steve Lafollette of Dreamers Studio created the spiral staircase with live-edge treads.

The kitchen addition made it possible to add a partial basement. The space, a preferred hangout for visiting grandchildren, nieces, and nephews, is accessed via a stunning spiral staircase with live-edge treads created by Phil and Steve Lafollette of Dreamers Studio that are affixed to a metal frame with an interesting faux bois finish.

Consistent over the years of renovations and redesigns is that nothing about this home is cookie-cutter. "It has been so fun getting to run with this theme," remarked Rush. A beautiful live edge bar top salvaged from the old kitchen was repurposed by the Bittners' woodworking shop into a custom credenza separating the space from the living room. Nearby, iron straps provide a focal point for bespoke closet doors, also crafted by Bittners.

A secondary dining area in the former kitchen space is defined by chairs with tooled leather seats, reminiscent of a fine Western saddle and a custom cowhide patchwork rug. As part of the most recent renovations, several upholstered pieces in the living area were refreshed, and a new custom rug from Anabel's was selected to anchor the seating area in front of the fireplace.

To quote the late American bull rider Lane Frost, "True cowboys are the ones who aren't afraid to get dirty." As this property has evolved alongside its owners, one thing has remained constant: it is, first and foremost, a working ranch and remains a hardworking beauty that deftly toes the line between style and substance. Nothing is too precious for man (or grandchild) nor beast, and it truly is a happy place for all who are lucky enough to pass through its gates. **sl**

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