

Cottage Comforts

Interior designer Kathryn Long takes a two-room, mountainside house through a series of rehabs and fills it with heirloom antiques and clever finds of all kinds

Wander antiques malls and Saturday morning auctions and you'll find veteran hunters like Kathryn Long, for whom green principles like "reuse," "recycle," and other conservation-minded building blocks are, quite frankly, old hat. The interior designer and longtime owner of Ambiance Interiors in downtown Asheville cites finds ranging from an oversized kitchen



Second Lives: At only 800 square feet, the cottage served Long's family as a modest guesthouse when they purchased it in 1970. Since taking it over from her parents, Kathryn has made a steady series of upgrades and additions and furnished it with all manner of antiques, including an oversized cabinet (above) originally built into a house in Virginia.



Prep Station:

The final renovation focused on the kitchen, which began as a very basic, utilitarian room with small, outdated appliances. Previously, Long had added a sunroom entry through a set of French doors to give the home a roomier feel, while the new granite countertops, pecan wood cabinetry, and an extended center island for entertaining further updated the small space.



Natural Extension: The north wall of the house was replaced by a set of French doors that lead into the living room, an add-on headlined by a stone hearth Long commissioned based off a 1930s design found in a home in Blowing Rock.

hutch originally built into a house in Virginia to two clawfoot tubs donated by a demo company in Hendersonville, both of which now reside in her renovated cottage.

"I'll find old vases, furniture, dish towels—linens of all kinds—and put them to use in my own house. It's all part of being my mother's daughter," she explains, adding that

she'd go with her to estate auctions that were held in "fabulous old mansions in Asheville. I watched as she spotted pieces that, for one reason or another, had been discarded. She'd find a use for these things when others couldn't."

In her own living room outside of Asheville, she points to a long, 1920s-era sofa she adopted nearly 30 years ago. "My parents



Suite Dreams: A trio of awning windows line the space above Long's bed, with washed cotton damask curtains flanking either side. The bed is crafted from Indonesian wood and dubbed the "Paris Bed."

were at yet another auction—my uncle was an auctioneer, so you could say it's in our blood—and they got tired of standing," she explains. "No one was bidding on this sofa, so they sat down on it. It was just this lonely old piece in the corner of the room. They liked how comfortable it was, so they took it home for \$25. It's since been recovered twice, but really, you

can't find anything better to lay down on."

In fact, there isn't much in Long's house that hasn't been reused or reconsidered, rescued or reconfigured, and the structure itself is no exception. The no-frills, circa-1950s building was just 800 square feet when her family bought it in 1970 to use as a guesthouse. "When we found it, it was almost like an out-

building, comprising two rooms with a single door entry," says Long.

Not until she entered graduate school at the University of Georgia did the house even have visitors, aside from the occasional cleaning and airing out by her mother. "At first, I'd stay here because it was a place away from home to live during college breaks," she recalls. "But

then, I just started getting this wonderful feeling about the ugly little house on the hill.”

So while the up-and-coming designer finished school, even jetted off for year-long stints in Europe and Manhattan, the “ugly little house” waited for her. “I knew I was going to come back to Asheville, and I knew I wanted to live in that house,” she recalls. “Because the house faces East, it has great Feng Shui. Light floods through in the mornings, and in the afternoons it filters down the mountain in the back. That’s what really got me hooked.”

Making It Home

Loving the house and living in it, however, meant that adjustments both major and minor were on the horizon. “I’ve gone through 20 or 30 different sketches for this house,” says Long. “I knew there were possibilities, and I just kept revising and adding on to get to what I really needed.”

There have been four additions, to be exact. At the time Long bought the house from her parents in the early 1980s, though, such lofty structural ambitions were still a long way off. Her



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Vintage Glam: Long’s collection of early 20th-century dressing gowns hangs in the upstairs landing and hallway alongside vintage bark cloth curtains that disguise closet space.



Squared Away: On the screened porch, a pair of chairs from the 1940s are outfitted with plump down cushions made from circa-1920 bedspreads and pillows fashioned from bark cloth remnants. Stained and painted oak flooring forms an oversized checkerboard pattern.

design firm was only a few years old, and she still wasn't sure which plan would be the right plan.

Thus, the first of many adjustments would focus on necessities. "There wasn't one closet to be found in this house," she laughs. The first go-round not only gave Long her much-needed storage space, but also replaced small inefficient windows, wood paneling, and wood flooring and added a sunroom entry on the southern corner of the house.

In the rehabs that followed, Long slowly and steadily reworked the house to meet the potential she saw from the start. The addition of a bank of windows along the front made the most of morning light, while expansion of the original bathroom—the only one in the house at the time—made way for a tub and accompanying powder room. A third rehab added the living room, a spacious screened porch, and a second floor for use as her bedroom.

"I was always very conscious of how everything would relate to the original rectangle," says Long, noting the incorporation of dormer windows upstairs as a way of retaining the house's shape. "It was challenging because I was always wary of making the house too big."

By the time the fourth overhaul was complete, incorporation of "a few feet here and a few feet there" would triple the size of the modest structure.

Of course, trading in the ugly duckling image for that of a rambling country cottage made a European-style garden a necessity. Along with other blooms, she planted lilacs right outside the windows of her bathroom so that the fragrance blows in with the wind down the mountain.

Early-Century Appeal

All along, it seems, Long's brand of second- and third-generation furnishings have been right at home—some brought in as more space calls for them, others just migrated from one room to the next. In either case, each is part of a collection within a collection and very much a part of modern-day life in the cottage. Old baskets, quilts, and glassware are inherited from Long's mother, while recycled fabrics in the form of vintage tablecloths, bed linens, and dish towels find their way into every room. Of particular note, however, is a collection of bark cloth, a fabric named for its rough, woven texture. "It became popular in the 1920s and was seen in households through the '50s," says Long, noting that all of her throw pillows are made from scraps of the retired fabric.

"My travels to France—I go almost every spring or fall—have had a significant influence on the way I furnish my home," she admits. "The French just have a way of making a room comfortable. They really understand how pieces should relate to one another. For instance, chairs are neither too close to one another, nor too far apart. I've always been fascinated by that."



Quiet Respite: Long relaxes on her screened porch, which opens to a stone path and back garden.



Chic Storage: A small log shed up the hill is used for garden storage.

Indeed, seeking out such domestic perfection has been a work in progress for the interior designer, one that began 32 years ago when the cottage on the side of the mountain came into her family. In the meantime, the ugly little house (turned *patient* little house) sat quietly while its owner added a little here, subtracted a little there. After all, it was only a matter of time. Like the passed-around sofa in the living room or the well-used linens in every room, the little cottage didn't have to be perfect—it just had to have potential.