

A Great Romance

A FEW OF HER FAVORITE THINGS. Sara's library is every bit a Christmas card with classic red and green accents, cozy knit pillows and throws, a floor-to-ceiling Christmas tree, candy-cane-colored stockings and fresh and faux evergreens. Even an old wall lantern lends a cozy feel to the room.

In this charming and nostalgic 1926 cottage, each room receives a festive dose of holiday cheer.

BY JO-ANNE COLETTA | PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHAD CHENIER



SEASONAL SUNSHINE. Sara chose to paint the front door a bright, cheery yellow. Whenever anyone asks where she drew her color inspiration from, she always responds, "Because it is the outward display of the joy in my heart!"
(OPPOSITE) SUGAR PLUM PORCH. Warm up your front porch with a Christmas tree, fresh winter greens, rustic antiques and a cozy hanging swing. Here, Sara and her miniature Shetland sheepdog, Rocky, rest on a handmade bed-swing (garnished with a candy cane ribbon) that was crafted from a local artisan—Ali's Creations in Calhoun, Louisiana. The Mrs. Claus Bake Shop sign adds a rustic touch.



MAKING A WISHLIST

Sara had a few requirements: the home must be at least 50 years old (preferably older), have at least three bedrooms and two bathrooms and be in a safe neighborhood. She also wanted it to be close to the airport and to family. The home also needed to have a small-to-medium-sized yard, be great for entertaining and be in a picturesque setting. "For twenty-two months, I was unequivocally smitten and completely devoted to wooing and pursuing a broken-down Louisiana cottage built in 1926," Sara said. And then she found it. "Located just on the edge of the historic residential district in Minden, Louisiana—it was perfect," said Sara.

There was only one problem—the home appeared to be abandoned. But a determined Sara went on a quest to find the owner and learn if they were willing to sell. After researching town records, she stumbled upon an email address of the owner and drafted her request for the home. Sara waited many months but had no response. It was the week of Christmas 2015 when, to Sara's surprise, the first communication string began—they were willing to sell, but needed a little time. Sara was thrilled! However, many months passed and communication fell distant from the owner. Sara began to feel the home was slipping through her hands. Yet, she remained determined to make this house her home. Sara explains, "I was beginning to lose all hope when a missionary friend of mine introduced a book to me that would change my prayer life: *The Circle Maker* by Mark Batterson. It couldn't have come at a better time. I began to pray." And it worked.


[TOP LEFT] MERRY MUDROOM. A pretty spot to lace your shoes [every girl needs one] with vibrant holiday décor that creates a jolly feel. Once an outdoor laundry room, it's now a mudroom with built-ins, a bench and cubbies. The wood floor is original and enhances the vintage vibe.

Snow-
bound by
Sherwin
Williams

Alabaster
by Sherwin
Williams



STOCKED WITH STOCKINGS. Let the hearth of your home be your main focal point. Here, the white fireplace is played against a high contrast of traditional Christmas colors of red, green and white. Side-by-side wreaths trimmed with Christmas flowers and berries, a string of plaid stockings and a scripted art scroll ('The weary world rejoices') adds an artistic hint of Christmas.



I
dwell
in
possibility

EMILY DICKINSON

READ ALL ABOUT IT. An ideal seat for the book collector. How did she hang them? Simple duct tape. A repurposed duo of old theater chairs from Michigan anchors the look with a scripted print above them that reads 'I dwell in possibilities.'



MAKING A HIT LIST

Sara has renovated and/or built several houses before, so a fixer-upper was not out of her expertise. She knew exactly what she wanted to do to the home and went for it whole-heartedly. "The entire floor plan was reconfigured, walls were ripped out, floors were refinished and new plumbing, electrical, insulation and HVAC were all installed," explains Sara. "I repurposed as many of the original details and architecture as possible. Every interior door in my cottage is original. All the existing light fixtures were restored and reused. Layers of wallpaper, cheesecloth and paneling were torn out, revealing 90-year-old shiplap. I was determined to return this crumbling little cottage to its former glory."

It was important to Sara for the home to have an open-concept floor plan. She wanted one continuous flow from one room to the next, and the kitchen was no exception. The wall adjoining the dining room was removed—Sara left the exposed beam to add character—triple windows above the sink were installed along with vinyl plank flooring. The kitchen island was handcrafted from reclaimed wood and has built-in storage. White cabinetry with acrylic bar hardware, quartz countertops, a white fireclay sink and stainless-steel appliances stoke up the charm factor.









[TOP] KITCHEN CHARM. You can't go wrong with a classic white kitchen. The neutral palette makes it easy to interchange from season to season with a few tasteful touches. Here, pops of red and green pair stunningly against the white cabinetry, shiplap walls and vinyl plank floors. The handcrafted island adds texture and vintage charm.

[OPPOSITE] JOYFUL SPIRIT. For the first two Christmases in Sara's cottage, she preferred a simple feel with natural greens gathered from the outdoors and modest decorations. But this Christmas, she turned up the whimsy! What receives the most attention? The one-of-a-kind dining chairs that are real show-stoppers and great conversation starters. A distressed farm table, a vintage chandelier covered in fresh greens and Sara's great-grandmother's hutch ties the look together.

The library room—previously a bedroom—was opened up to connect the living and dining areas. Two windows were removed and replaced by a fireplace and side-by-side bookcases. They painted and the trim alongside the vinyl plank floors continued throughout.


MAKING IT MAGICAL

In the dining room, everything is bright and colorful. "My vision for the dining room was like a scene out of Candyland," says Sara. "I incorporate both faux and real Christmas greens as well as modern and vintage items to create a dreamy, magical Christmas setting." The unique dining chairs (crafted by ChairWhimsy.com) add playfulness to the room, with a white-washed farmtable, a vintage chandelier and Sara's most treasured heirloom, her great-grandmother's hutch that's been passed down for generations.



BEDROOM BLISS. Sara keeps the holiday cheer flowing even in the bedroom. A Christmas tree dotted with twinkle lights and snowy branches, framed holiday typography and a four-poster bed decked in classic plaid bedding coaxes you into a long winter's nap.



Sara's home looks like something from a Hallmark movie—all who visit think so, and family and friends appreciate all the special touches Sara conjures up for the holidays. Sara believes that "Christmas is a special time in the South, and Louisiana is no exception. It's a place where hope resides and prayers are answered. It's where a little girl found hope and grew up in a place she calls home." 

SEE SOURCES, PAGE 128

BATHING BEAUTY. It only takes a few minor touches to say "Ho-Ho-Ho" in the bathroom. Here, Sara swapped out everyday bath décor with seasonal accessories and poinsettia plants. Even a towel basket wears a red bow.

