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SEPTEMBER 2012



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The soft gray color of the house's weathered cedar shingles inspired the interior's neutral palette. Above right: Homeowner Sam Cato and her horse, Brumby



# TOWN & COUNTRY

FOR CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA,  
DESIGNER *MISSI ERVIN* AND  
HOMEOWNER *SAM CATO*,  
RENOVATING A FORMER HORSE  
STABLE AND CARRIAGE HOUSE  
IN AIKEN MEANT RETURNING THE  
HISTORIC COTTAGE TO ITS  
EQUESTRIAN ROOTS

by *SUSAN STILES DOWELL* - photographs by *LAUREY W. GLENN*  
styling by *MATTHEW GLEASON* - produced by *MOLLY POWER PASTOR*




# Living in a horse stable isn't everyone's cup of tea.

But for horsewoman Sam Cato, the draw was irresistible. The house in Aiken, South Carolina, was always one of her favorite spots along the riding trails of Hitchcock Woods. It sat back under the trees on a former estate, a pretty shingle-style cottage that no one would guess had started life as a horse stable and carriage house. Sam knew its pedigree and loved its location.

The house's U-shaped layout and the easy elegance of its weathered, rambling look suited her casual lifestyle with five dogs. Where the carriages used to be stored was a long, open living/dining area. Flanking it were a kitchen and guest rooms on one side and a master suite and office on the other. Best of all, Sam could walk through the back door to reach the horse stalls and saddle up.

Of course, the house was not without its problems; no major improvements had been made since its 1980s conversion. Sam was an old hand at renovation (this was her seventh), so she knew how a project could implode from costly surprises and ran into a big one right away. "Pipes embedded in the old house's cement under the pine floors were leaking and had to be jackhammered out," Sam says. She remembered some European oak flooring she'd spotted two renovations back. "The finish was hand waxed, and the gray tones complemented the weathered shingles outside," she says. The flooring was the start of the mood Sam wanted and a palette for her future decor.



A leather tufted ottoman and mohair on the sofas "wear like iron"—a plus considering Sam has five dogs, including Patch, the Jack Russell terrier shown here.



1 A rustic farm table takes the place of a central island in the kitchen, giving Sam a spot for casual meals.

2 An antique Welsh cupboard holds a taxidermy hen and rooster, china, art, and a collection of woven baskets.

3 Sam loves to collect tortoiseshell boxes from domestic sources. (Importing them is illegal.)

4 The horse stalls are off the kitchen, making a daily ride part of life here.

5 Found feathers fill Sam's late husband's silver sailing trophy.

6 "I was tired of the look of white or stainless steel," says Sam about her choice of a gray farm sink.

7 Dog collectibles, including a doorknocker and tiny statues, are displayed throughout the house.

The European oak floors look old but are actually new from Bois Chamois ([boischamois.com](http://boischamois.com)). The company distresses flooring to resemble reclaimed wood.



#### **GUEST ROOM**

Ninety yards of Gastón y Daniela's equestrian toile was paper-backed to hang as a wallcovering. The floors are painted Linen White by Benjamin Moore.

#### **STREET VIEW**

Sam and Brumby walk the road past her shingle-style home (opposite, top). Aiken has preserved its signature dirt roads for horse-friendly traffic.

#### **MASTER BEDROOM**

(opposite, bottom) A robin's egg blue in the linen curtains inspired the wall color, Silver Ash by Martin-Senour Paints.







As the renovation gained more momentum, Sam wanted help holding the reins. Reconstituting the interior required everything from new plumbing and electrical plans to a new kitchen and a livable plan for furnishings. She turned to Missi Ervin, a Charleston designer and registered South Carolina architect, who zeroed in on the importance of a moody gray palette. "It's shady and cool for the hot summers and conveys the comfort of a farm, only dressier," says Missi. She sifted through paint samples to find *Stony Ground* by Farrow & Ball, which would make a seamless whole

of the choppy-feeling house.

In the long center room, Missi went further and removed extraneous chair rails to show off a continuous stretch of original V-groove paneling and replaced the mantel with a larger one inspired by a Georgian design of architect A. Hays Town. Trickier was the task of divvying up the room functions across the open area. When they realized the only place to put Sam's favorite crystal chandelier was right in the center, Missi pulled Sam's dining table under it. The result: a center table that can also open for buffets. "Aiken's a cocktail party town," says Sam, "and this was a versatile alternative to having a separate room that I would hardly use."

The earth-toned velvet and mohair fabrics Missi used to reupholster Sam's furniture embrace both durability and elegance. The dogs and all of Sam's hunt memorabilia look right at home. Sam hung the art and grouped the collections herself. "It takes most people years to find their confidence with that last layer," says Missi. "But for Sam, pulling all her wonderful things together at the end was a treat." Like her decision to renovate a former stable, it came naturally. ●

**LOVE IT? GET IT!** Source info, page 137

## Meet Designer Missi Ervin



**HOMETOWN** Mayesville, SC

**OCCUPATION** Owner, Melissa Ervin Interior Design in Charleston, SC

**TRADEMARK** Interiors with a neutral foundation and a layer of color and pattern on top

**INSPIRED BY** Fashion—for color and pattern

**FAVORITE SHOPPING SOURCE** The Charleston Artist Collective for amazing small pieces of affordable artwork. The group also donates a percentage to local nonprofits. [charlestonartistcollective.org](http://charlestonartistcollective.org)

**RIGHT NOW I'M LOVING** Textured wallpaper, vintage bamboo furniture, and shagreen accessories

**GO-TO PAINT COLOR** Matchstick (2013) by Farrow & Ball. It's a great neutral with some life.

**SOUTHERN STYLE IS** Silk damask, hydrangeas in silver mint julep cups, family photos in sterling silver frames, and oil portraits of family members

**FAVORITE DECORATING TIP** Add wallpaper to the backs of bookshelves for depth and warmth.

