

# Traditional ECLECTIC

With a deep love of color and an eye for vintage style, this homeowner has created an art form out of the unexpected.



When Mary Nelle Clem felt a desire to move from her newer home to something more historic, she found the perfect candidate. A 1915 cottage located in a historic area of northern Alabama became the perfect canvas for a style that blends bold colors and storied antiques.

With the help of her daughter, Mary Catherine Folmar, the homeowner set about filling the home

with uplifting shades and daring patterns matched with her ever-expanding collection of vintage and antique items. Her unique style is first seen on the front porch, where the outdoor furniture is upholstered with textiles from Mary Catherine's store, Cotton & Quill. It's Mary Nelle's favorite part of the home. "It's calming," she notes the early-morning birdsong that accompanies her daily Bible studies.

Mother and daughter both share a love for the living room, where—mingled with antique tables, cabinets, and other items—pieces like the purple cowhide layered over a sisal rug truly stand out. The room's style was designed around the Cotton & Quill pattern that was chosen for the camelback sofa and window treatments. The fabric's color was custom designed for the space, which is set against the backdrop of "Palladian Blue" walls. "I just think blue is soothing," Mary Nelle says, noting that, while many designers opt for white or beige tones, she's never been one to avoid brighter hues. "I just see color as a neutral," she adds.



Mary Nelle installed a pair of French doors at the back of the living room in order to soften the view of the hallway from the front door. She used the space above the doors to display an assortment of decorative figures and artwork.



Lucite chairs, a lacquered Oriental cabinet, and an eccentrically printed yellow-and-turquoise armchair may not seem like pieces that belong in the same room, but Mary Nelle's vision makes it appear as though they were never meant to be anywhere else. Whimsy abounds in the space, grounded by classic landscapes, antique tables, and the neutral foundation of a sisal rug.



Another place that Mary Nelle deviates from the expected is in the kitchen, where she chose to leave things largely as she found them. “It reminds me of my grandmother’s house, so I haven’t touched the kitchen,” she says, pointing out the yellow pine paneling that many would have opted to paint. Instead, she has filled the space with pieces that complement its classic style, like the tole chandelier and vintage silver pieces.

Mary Nelle’s collection of character jugs started decades ago when she was the co-owner of a Williamsburg gift accessory shop—the first in Alabama. “George Washington was my first one,” she notes of the pieces, “and I’ve since picked them up at estate sales.”



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The dining room, where blue once again reigns, houses a number of antique collections, including the Delft bread and butter plates that line the mirror on one wall. A pair of chairs whose seats feature intricate needlepoint were an auction find, and they anchor the diverse collection of plates and platters adorning the space above.

In the front bedroom, a classic four-poster bed and richly hued armchair offer comfortable spots to rest while a more contemporary beaded chandelier hangs overhead. The drapes feature a koi pattern, which, according to Mary Catherine, has always been a favorite of

both ladies. “I did it in a neutral flax . . . to go with the more traditional furnishings that are in that room,” she adds. Pieces like the acid-wash cowhide rug and colorful bedside lamp provide pops of whimsical inspiration.

Every room in the home exhibits a love of timeworn pieces that Mary Nelle has carried with her for most of her life. “I think they have a story, and they have good bones,” she says of antiques. “And that’s what I think is so interesting.” Found among the eye-catching patterns and colors permeating the cottage, these storied treasures are right at home in the style that Mary Nelle calls “traditional eclectic.” ▼

TEXT BY BETHANY ADAMS PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARCY BLACK SIMPSON



*“It’s very historic. It’s kind of like a little American bungalow.”*

—Mary Catherine Folmar

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