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# VIRGINIA

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY STEWART FERRELL  
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### DINING

The Red Hen's  
storybook charm

### HOME

Agroovy  
Greek Revival

### FOOD

Winter dishes  
to pair with beer



# A Groovy Greek Revival

Smithsonia, a brick manse in Fredericksburg, has been a girls' orphanage, a wartime hospital and a men's college dormitory. Now it's a chic mix of old world and new, with lilac-colored walls, a Louis Vuitton footstool (of sorts) and a glass tube walkway in the back: fitting décor for the fashionable lady of the house.

By Neely Barnwell Dykshorn • Photography by Kip Dawkins



What does one expect to find beyond the storied thresholds of historic Fredericksburg? Candlelight? Costumed interpreters? You might be surprised upon ascending the stone steps to the columned portico of Smithsonia, a stately Greek Revival house commanding an entire corner lot on Amelia Street. From the first sight of the lady of the house gliding through the hall in chic leather-wrapped stilettos and artfully ragged jeans, it's clear that what you are going to get is anything but expected.

"People come to the door all the time and ask if this is an office or a museum," says Cathy Stewart of the impressive brick manse, where she lives with her husband, Doug, a wealth management consultant, and their three kids. But color is the only business inside: lac walls and molding in the formal dining room, armoire rear panels for the bookshelves in the library and an orange TV room with a silver foil-papered bar—and that's just the first floor.

Stewart, a former runway model who worked for such designers as Carolina Herrera and Chanel in New York and Washington, has a whimsical nature, which helped interior designer Suellen Gregory channel her client's wishes into a fashionable decorative scheme shortly after the couple bought the house in 2007. "Cathy really is so adventuresome," says Gregory. "She loves color. She makes it fun. What I love about the house is that it has a wonderful, elegant, old world quality mixed with younger, hipper stuff."

Smithsonia's history is complex and nothing close to tip. The home was built in 1834 on what is the original site of the Presbyterian church of Fredericksburg. The church was founded in 1808, when there were only two Presbyterians in town; by 1832, the congregation had outgrown its original home on the Amelia Street site, where Smithsonia now stands, and moved to a new sanctuary at the corner of George and Princess Anne streets, the site of the present Presbyterian Church.

The house was built on the old site as an orphanage for girls and later served as a hospital during the Civil War. Then, in 1867, a



opened it as a boarding house for female senior citizens and named it Smithsonia. That wasn't the last of its incarnations; around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Smithsonia served as a boys' dormitory for what was then Fredericksburg College. Graffiti carved in the brick façade sometime in the 19<sup>th</sup> century attests to years when the house sat derelict. In 1917, William E. Lang bought the home, and it remained in the Lang family until

**Top: The kitchen eat-in area has patent leather chairs around a Baroque-style table. Below, from left: looking from a downstairs bath into the living room; the entrance hall.**

1942. That explains why it is often called the Lang House as well as Smithsonia.

Two generations and two changes of ownership later, the Stewarts were living blocks away from Smithsonia

when they learned the iconic hot was available. After buying it, the couple made some cosmetic changes—and then, in 2008, they moved out for eight months so the kitchen and master bedroom suite could be expanded and renovated. They moved back in 2008—one week before Christmas.

Bob Steele of BOB Architecture in Richmond, a college friend of Doug Stewart's who'd done previous work for the family, designed the new space. Rather than deviate from the original footprint with a two-story addition, he and the Stewarts configured a new kitchen and master suite inside the structure and added a refined three-bay brick garage and carriage house, with glass entry. "It is always an interesting conversation with historians when you are putting a contemporary addition onto an old building," says Steele.

The best way to touch an old structure, Steele says, is to do it in a transparent way—literally. "Cathy had just returned from Paris and had seen all this glass work," says Steele, "and I liked the idea of not having a traditional dark entry foyer" at the back of the house. The result is a modern carriage house (that does look so new) with a vertical modern glass connecting tube that serves as entry to both the garage and the back of the house.

Inside Smithsonia, where fashion references can be found in every room. In the TV room, there is a Chippendale poster by Andy Warhol from a window display at the Paris boutique, a dining room rug designed by Diane von Furstenberg, and a clever library footstool that the upholsterer stitched together from several Louis Vuitton bags. Ruched silk covers for the chandelier chains throughout the house add subtle dressmaker touches overhead.

The entry hall features Stark wallpaper with a peacock pattern, a design Gregory chose knowing Stewart's affection for the bird.





**Top:** In the library, a 1930s painting of Daisy, a circus performer in San Francisco, is by Doug Stewart's grandfather and namesake, Douglas. At right, the curved door visible through the door to the dining room conceals an elevator to the English basement kitchen. **Below, from left:** stairs and a view to the family room; the master bath, with the dressing room beyond.



was installed by H.J. Holtz & Son, who hung the panels on linen so they could be moved, a custom adopted by Virginian Nancy Lancaster, who once moved 18<sup>th</sup>-century silk wallpaper halfway across England for her home at Kelmars Hall. As Gregory says of the undertaking, "Scenic papers, not for the faint of heart ..." The pattern was configured so that the peacock appears on one side of the hall with his tail open and

on the other side, closed. The bedrooms for the Stewart children are flung on the house's second and third floors. (Two of the kids attend Fredericksburg Academy, a school Doug Stewart helped to found 18 years ago.) Richmond-based decorative painter Sunny Goode was brought in to add some flourish to the rooms. She created a whimsical frieze of fish for 8-year-old Douglas Clayton's marine blue

room and a green damask pattern on white panels in the pink bedroom of 14-year-old Catherine Greer. (The room of 17-year-old Kenneth Coleman is off limits to visitors.) "Sunny was thrilled to be creating the backdrop for this," says Cathy, pointing to an over-scale, sunshine yellow, tufted patent-leather headboard in Greer's room (all three kids go by their middle names). Cathy herself painted a demure porcelain bust of a

young girl acid yellow, and perfectly. When designing the English basement kitchen, the Stewart worked with Richmond's KDW Home (formerly Kite Designworks). KDW suggested marble-topped cabinets on platforms as in an English country house. A rare 19<sup>th</sup>-century Dutch manganese picture sunnied by Kim Fa

Antiques in Richmond—sets the design tone for the room. Even the Viking stove's plum color was chosen to complement it. The eat-in area is uncommonly chic, with white patent leather-upholstered dining chairs surrounding a Baroque-style table (painted white)—and the wall beyond opens into a green, Wonkaesque conservatory that is original to the house. In that room, potting benches were transformed into seats,

and Gregory had striped cushions made to go with them—a groovy spin on a classic American Victorian architectural feature. The Stewarts have been careful not to alter too many of the physical properties of the house—a challenging commitment when the talk turned to improving the lighting in the living room, which is the biggest space in the house. It had no ceiling light. "We were asking

ourselves, 'Should we do wiring in the ceiling?'" says Gregory. Answer: no. She subsequently found two late 19<sup>th</sup>-century Italian plaster medallions (from a shop in Santa Monica), had them installed them on the ceiling and draped the cords in silk. An electrician planed the medallions so they could be flush-mounted to the ceiling. The Stewarts, who also own a home in the Outer Banks (Corolla)

and another in Deepwater Cay the Bahamas, say they are happy at the Smithsonian, and with its eclectic décor. It's all come together to a stylish, reasonably child-friendly home for the family. "I'm a city person, and the kids love it," says Cathy, "but I think my husband would be happier on a farm in Blacksburg." Maybe that will be next. ●