



nothing
COULD BE *finer*

An 1880s house in the Carolinas was updated and expanded with a respect for history and an embrace of casual, collected comfort

INTERIOR DESIGN BY *Jackye Lanham*
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It was time for an 1880s Carolina house to be updated, but so subtly that it would seem as if nothing had been done. Architect Stan Dixon “expanded” the family room by opening it up to the beams. A Rose Tarlow sofa, accented with throw pillows from Bungalow Classic, is set in front of a 19th-century English chestnut coffee table from Acquisitions Interiors. A French draper’s table (far right) is from Provenance Antiques. A bottle lamp from Bungalow Classic fills the room with light at night.



It's not uncommon for old Southern houses to have two kitchens. This page: The utilitarian so-called "back kitchen" is lit with a ceramic pendant. Opposite page: The main kitchen, with a painted checkerboard floor, contains shelves of vintage white ironstone, from Foxglove Antiques and the Nicholson Gallery.



The diagonal paneling in the dining room is original to the house. Some of the homeowners' mismatched chairs are placed around the table, which is dressed with a fringed handwoven throw. The room's ten-arm chandelier and sconces are antiques.

IN A RURAL CAROLINA TOWN where the number of paved roads can be counted on one hand, change can be as slow as the shrimp boats meandering down the river. So, when a city couple purchased an 1880s waterfront home here 14 years ago, they were content to live with its cramped quarters and imperfect details until they felt ready to do something about it.

A decade later, they were ready. "It took us a while to figure out exactly what we wanted," admits the wife, whose children had left home by this point and would soon have offspring of their own. She and her husband had worked on previous houses with Atlanta architect Stan Dixon and interior designer Jackye Lanham, and they asked the pair to enhance and expand the vacation home—without leaving any trace of their intervention.

"They wanted the house to look as though it had always been there," explains Dixon, who has included the house in his new book, *Home: The Residential Architecture of D. Stanley Dixon* (Rizzoli). The architect removed a couple of misguided additions, then enlarged the porches in the front and rear, adding French doors to improve the flow between interior and exterior. He filled in the remaining sides with a kitchen, guest room and bath, making them look like extensions of the porch that had been enclosed years before. "It really gave this house a feeling it had evolved over time," Dixon says.

The ruse didn't end there. The architect built a detached structure that looks like a vintage summer kitchen, but is actually a master suite, then linked it to the house with a breezeway concealing a spacious family room. To elevate the room's ceiling without compromising the home's 19th-century proportions, Dixon opened the space to the roofline, exposing a tapestry of intersecting timbers above.

The standing seams on the metal roof were crimped by hand, just as they were a century ago. "They have the sense of being made by a person, and not a machine, so they're slightly irregular," Dixon notes. (A coat of thick red paint completes the period look.) Solid shutters alternate with louvered ones, while interior doors are adorned with iron hardware in some rooms and unlacquered brass in others—illusory hallmarks of age that enhance the home's sense of history.

Lanham's assignment was equally strategic. "The owners wanted the house to be totally un-decorated," she says. "They did not want it to look like I had even been there." Utilizing a lot of the couple's existing pieces, she reupholstered chairs

and reframed art to refresh things, then added a variety of non-pedigree antiques to create a casual, eclectic interior that looks as if it developed at its own pace over the years. "We had to be careful," she confides. "You can't just add some piece of fancy English furniture to things that have been hanging around and banged up—it looks terrible."

A sense of homespun improvisation animates each room, with patterns and colors layered upon one another with seeming abandon. The trick to making it harmonize, Lanham says, is to begin with a color palette (in this case, celery green, red, cream, yellow, and brown) and then just build on it. "If you see an old pillow and it's in your color range, you can throw it in there and it just starts working," she says. When Lanham couldn't find what she needed, she created it, treating an old pair of Jenny Lind beds in the guest room to a coat of red paint—and doing the same for the drab maple chest between them.

Mismatched chairs and a tablecloth improvised from a handwoven throw add casual charm to the dining room, where the original diagonal paneling was lovingly preserved and painted a serene sage, then augmented with built-in bookcases that allow the space to double as a library.

Visitors are instructed to park on the lawn ("I didn't want a driveway, it's too formal," says the wife) before venturing into the white-paneled entry hall, where a treacherous old staircase was replaced by prosaic painted steps and plank railings that mimic the ones on the porch. "This is a little country house," Lanham says. "It's not fancy by any means, and that just seemed to be the appropriate thing to put in it."

The new kitchen is equally unpretentious, with a painted checkerboard applied over the oak floor to help distinguish the space from the adjoining family room, as well as painted cabinets that look for all the world like 1950s originals. (They're not.) An artisan crafted the island out of "sinker" cypress rescued from the bottom of a river, then topped it with a geometric design that emulates old-fashioned linoleum. Mundane tasks are consigned to the "back kitchen," where plastic laminate counters edged in chrome continue the '50s theme.

The remodel more than doubled the home's size without compromising the character that first attracted the owners. "I wanted it to look like the same house," affirms the wife. "It was there long before we were, and you just have to respect that." ■

This page: In a guest bedroom, an owners' chair "found on the side of the road" is reupholstered with a Fabricut pattern. A spindle-style bed is set on a kilim rug. Opposite page: A look into the powder room at the entry hall reveals Waterworks's Dewey Wall Sconce, in nickel, A black iron pendant is set at the center of the entry space.





A pair of red painted twin beds occupies another guest bedroom. The bird prints and child's chair in the corner are vintage.