

A New Outlook for an Old Kentucky Home

Walmac Farm

Written by Bridget Williams

Photography by Lee Thomas



For 14 miles, from Main Street in Paris, Kentucky to North Broadway in downtown Lexington, Paris Pike offers what is arguably the pinnacle of picturesque miles of any byway in the Commonwealth. Since the early part of the 19th century, a stately, and now substantial, home has presided over the rolling acreage. Among the fortunate few to have called this significant property home are Mia and Johnny Jones, the second generation of the family to take up residence after they moved to Lexington from Houston on a full-time basis three years ago.

Mia, an established and sought after interior designer in her hometown of Houston and current co-proprietor of Chamblin Jones on West Short Street in Lexington, keeps a dog-eared copy of *The Enchanted Bluegrass* by Elizabeth Simpson, published in 1938, to study up on the history of the property, which was given its current name, Walmac Farm, in the 1930s when significant renovations and additions to the modest two-over-two farmhouse were made. When she and her husband acquired the residence from her in-laws, she likened its condition to "a charming old lady whose makeup was running."



The sofa in the living room is by Rudin Holland, upholstered in sherry velvet. The abstract is by Brent Groves. Stark table lamp for Kastel. Custom iron coffee table; 18th century bench in John Hutton fabric; and, John Saladino chairs on either side of "Cloud Tendrils", a blown glass installation by DH McNabb.



Having made numerous trips to Lexington and the farm for some three decades, Mia was quite familiar with the home and respected its history but was eager to implement her own design aesthetic – the antithesis of the home's existing "traditional" horse country style. She began by darkening the hardwood floors and lightening the walls in grayish hues with paint from Farrow & Ball. "It took me a while to get the right colors, as the northern light is quite different from the southern light that I'm used to," she remarked. Also tricky was furniture placement throughout the home with windows located in the center of the wall in several rooms.

The home has two main entrances. The side, or "family entrance," welcomes one into a true lacquered paneled hallway. The process of transforming the stained wood into a glossy sheen using Fine European Paints was quite a process but worth it as evidenced by the fact that it is one of the few spaces without a fabulous piece of art. "I love the Gustavian feel," said Mia. The monochromatic serenity is given a jolt in the adjacent powder room, where a bold tribal-esque wall covering from Donghia is found.

A departure from the pervading palette of grey and taupe, the light carrot-colored burnt silk wallcovering in the study enhances the coziness of the room. Commanding attention is an 8'x10' Conté pencil on Formica, one of several



Centered in the dining room is a custom painted table by Sheema Muneer. Surmounting the fireplace is a painted sketch for an Aubusson. French salon chairs from 1880 are found on either side of the hearth. Reflected in the mirror is "Girl" by Karen Broker.

pieces by Karen Broker in the home. Mia chose to execute a subtle two-tone paint treatment on the raised panel doors.

As it also serves as a busy thoroughfare between several rooms, the orientation of the furnishings in the dining room are atypical of what one would expect. While the oval painted table is centrally positioned, the chairs are scattered around the room. Along one wall is a velvet banquette whose custom-made appearance belies the fact that it was procured from a former client. Another oversized work by Karen Broker leans against the wall.

Fine examples of French and Italian antiques can be spied in every room. Mia said she is drawn to them for their "quiet quality," and they seem to be particularly suited to her European approach of mixing antiquities within a carefully edited contemporary framework. Among her favorite pieces are a pair of French slipper chairs with silk upholstery in the dining room and two Venetian gilded chairs in the living room. "It's all about finding the proper tension," she explained.

Window shutters provide visual interest and help manage an abundance of natural light in the living room. "Cloud Tendrils", an installation of white blown glass forms by artist DH McNabb, populates a centrally positioned table. McNabb, represented by Chamblin Jones, recently received an artist-in-residence commission from the Hermès Foundation.



In the living room, an ottoman upholstered in Glant silk velvet is positioned in front of "Cloud Tendrils", a blown glass installation by DH McNabb.



In the original entry a Barbara Berry starburst mirror reflects "Caryatid" by Lucy Owen. In the adjoining room is a custom iron daybed with Holland and Sherry Wool.

The chandelier, which dates to the Victorian era, originally hung in the entryway.



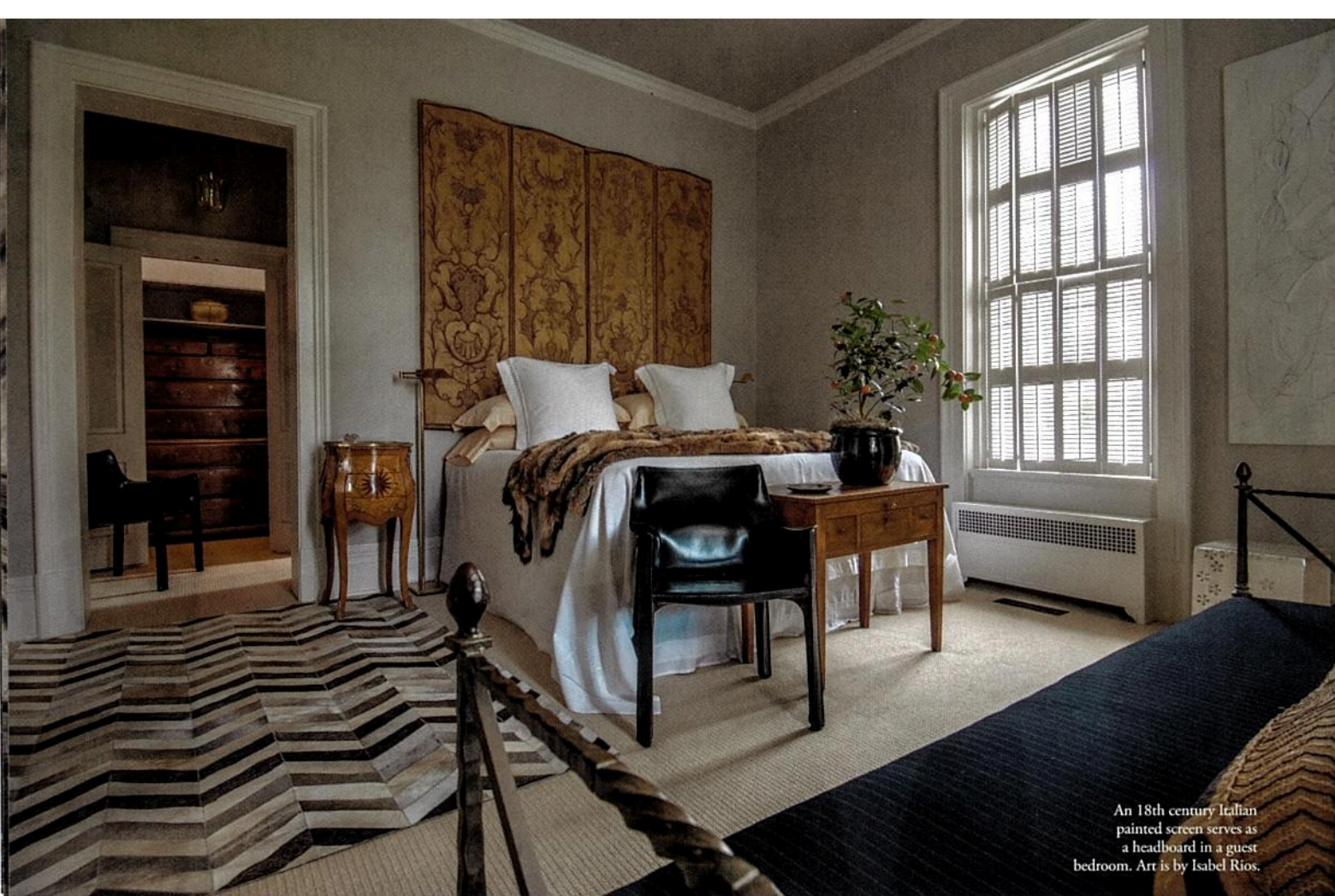
A sun porch marks what was the home's original entrance. At one point the couple had plans to remove the addition but have since come to enjoy the sunny spot. Illuminating the original entry hall is a chandelier that belonged to Mia's mother. The Victorian-era example that had been there is now suspended above the grand piano in the living room. Mia selected a sisal runner for the curved staircase, which, when combined with several pieces of contemporary art, provides a fresh perspective within the traditional architectural framework. "The art is really a game changer, and the juxtaposition is so refreshing," she said.

From room-to-room, Mia is consistent in creating impactful spaces that allow the eye to rest and appreciate the surroundings. "My long suit is that I edit very well," she explained, adding that this is a boon to her clients whose attachment to their objects can make it hard to decide what should remain. Self-taught, Mia said she was inspired by her mother's "extremely fabulous" taste. She remarked that her design directives have become a bit bolder as her career has progressed. "It all comes with becoming more confident in yourself and your abilities," she said.



The study features burnt silk wall covering. Encompassing nearly an entire wall is a Conté pencil on Formica by Karen Broker. The abstract pieces above the sofa are by Chris Lassiter.





An 18th century Italian painted screen serves as a headboard in a guest bedroom. Art is by Isabel Rios.



Hanging above a pair of twin beds from Restoration Hardware in a guest bedroom are 19th century gilded crown headboards with red leather upholstery.



"Orb II" by Helene Steene enlivens a guest bedroom. The table beneath is from Holly Hunt.

A split landing at the top of the staircase leads the way to two original bedrooms, which have the benefit of retaining the 12-foot ceilings found on the first floor. Lavender accents and a king-sized bed with a simple upholstered headboard create a tranquil treat in one of the rooms; in the other, a carved antique headboards with red leather upholstery surmount a pair of metal beds from Restoration Hardware.

Looking to the future, Mia is devising a plan to transform a large second-floor living room, a space she affectionately refers to as her father-in-law's "cowboy room," complete with rough-hewn walls, into a spacious master suite. Spurring her on is a bank of windows that promises enviable bird's eye views of the surrounding rolling farmland.

When she's working for clients, Mia said that it's important to deliver a finished project that exceeds their expectations. "I like to rethink what traditional means and move my clients subtly down that road," she added. A part-time visitor who is now a full-time resident, she's also rethought what Lexington means to her: "I love how the city has evolved and what is happening. It's an exciting time to be here." 