



Polishing a GHM

USING HER ASTUTE EYE, A JEWELRY DESIGNER STRINGS TOGETHER FAMILY KEEPSAKES, ANTIQUES, AND MODERN ART TO HIGHLIGHT THE INNATE BEAUTY OF A 1700s STONE FARMHOUSE.

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We tend to not be particularly trendy. We love a more classic style, but maybe with a little bit of fun art and a pop of color here and there.

 $-{\rm homeowner}\,{\rm Cara}\,{\rm Brown}$

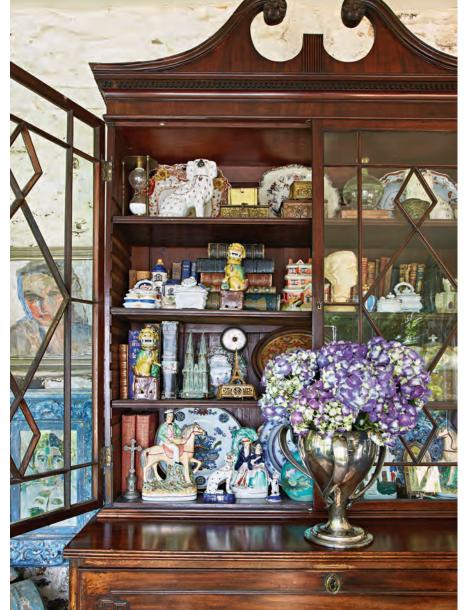
f a full and happy house can reflect full and happy hearts, the Brown family's 1724 stone farmhouse does just that. Nestled into the rolling hills of rural New Jersey, the house's compact rooms brim with collected treasures and beloved heirlooms. "Is there a hashtag for 'not a minimalist'?" Cara Brown asks with a laugh. She proudly owns her eclectic style, which includes pedigreed European antiques and modern art. It's a look she began gravitating to as a child watching her interior designer mother coax clients into displaying forgotten family pieces. "She gave the items that might have once been in a drawer a special place in the home, and I always loved that," Cara says.

After college, Cara turned her hobby of scavenging yard sales and antiques stores into a business with a friend, making Christmas ornaments hand-beaded with vintage jewelry. That skill of applying contemporary design to something old and overlooked led to her current jewelry-design business, Cara Brown Designs, in which she turns antique pieces like English horse brasses into one-of-a-kind necklaces. Not surprisingly, these are also the skills she called upon when decorating the perfectly preserved cottage she and her husband, David, moved into in 2005. "We haven't altered the house so much," she says. Instead, they focused on furnishing it. "We love a wide range of artwork, and that mix creates a unique backdrop for each room. Like my jewelry, each piece has its own story."

Coming from a large Tudor-style home in Texas, Cara, David, and their three children made a big adjustment to the quaint home with low 18th-century ceilings. "At times, we're on top of each other, but we love it," Cara says. "It's not a big house, but every room is so special."







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To fit the new space, Cara and David carefully edited their belongings, keeping only the heirlooms that meant the most, such as David's grandmother's Queen Anne secretary, 18th-century club chairs found during a trip to Europe, and a set of Imari ware they bought when they were first married. Some pieces are from curated antiques stores and some are garage sale finds. A Picasso-signed lithograph mingles with paintings by emerging artists. Cara is open to anything as long as it meets one important criterion: She has to fall in love with it. "I'm not a person who turns things over very easily," she says. "That's not how we approach collecting. We choose things we'll have for a lifetime."

That broad view is also how they see their family's time in the cottage. As happy as they have been in the home, they regard themselves as part of a continuum. "It's our turn in this house's history," Cara says. "We're stewards of it, and

we're doing things that will continue to stand the test of time." To that end, over the years they have invested in a slate roof and copper gutters, and they extended the patio using reclaimed bricks and stone. Last summer, they built a small outbuilding for Cara to use as a studio. Every detail, from the copper-topped cupola to the mural rendered by the same artist who painted their dining room, was planned to make it look as if it had always been on the property.

Whether she's working in her studio on a jewelry piece or arranging curios on their Welsh dresser, Cara is content. "Sometimes old farmhouses with big, heavy beams can feel dark, and people shy away from them. But in all that we do, we try to create a light and cozy feeling that makes anyone feel welcome," she says. "People often come in and say, "This is such a happy house!"

Designers: Cara and David Brown









Slim French beds share a bookcase nightstand for a just-right fit in their daughter's bedroom, far left. "Scale is always an interesting challenge," Cara says. "It is sometimes tricky to make it feel livable without feeling squished." The walls of the farmhouse, left, are 18 inches thick because of the stone masonry used to construct them. All the stone was taken from the property, Cara says, and the couple continue to unearth material to maintain the pathways and garden-bed edges as well.