

Southern Living

THE SOUTH'S BEST
SEASON

SIMPLE
SLOW-COOKER
SUPPERS

55 NEW WAYS
TO CELEBRATE
& DECORATE
THIS FALL

"MUMKINS"
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Cast Iron
Cooking
Secrets

Dolly Parton
The SL Interview

An Amazing
Cabin Makeover

OCTOBER 2014

SOUTHERNERS ARE HEIRS TO A RICH AND VARIED TROVE OF HISTORIC ARCHITECTURE. IT TAKES PASSION AND DEDICATION, BUT FOR CERTAIN SOULFUL AESTHETES, THERE'S NOTHING LIKE

LIVING IN A LANDMARK

BY MIMI READ PRODUCED BY ZOË GOWEN



FACADE
John Wilkinson stands in front of his home, one of downtown Lexington, Kentucky's eminent landmarks, equally renowned for its Ionic portico as it is for its wild parties.

BALLROOM
As the plaster medallion crumbles, John works the pieces into displays in his 20- by 40-foot double parlor known as "the ballroom."



ONLINE

Do you live in a landmark?
Share a photo of your
home with us at [facebook.com/southernliving](https://www.facebook.com/southernliving).



KENTUCKY MANSION

LEXINGTON KY

NAME OF HOUSE: The Thomas January House

YEAR BUILT: Circa 1810

ARCHITECT: Unknown

STYLE: Greek Revival with Italianate flourishes

CURRENT OWNER: John Wilkison, an antiques dealer

Around 1810, local hemp producer and civic leader Thomas January built this grand city house for himself. In 1840, Tobias Gibson, a wealthy Louisiana plantation owner of mixed race bought the home to escape hot Deep South summers. After Tobias sold the January House, it lodged the Lexington Episcopal Theological Seminary and later Campbell-Hagerman College, a finishing school for women. During the 1960s, it was divided into nine apartments. When John Wilkison bought the house in '99, he combined two apartments on the main floor into one large unit for himself. With plenty of room to spare, John continues to rent out the upstairs apartments.

If These Walls Could Talk

During its years as a dilapidated rental, the "Big Spooky House" was a hippie haven where legendary Halloween parties transpired. This is one of many traditions John keeps alive. Legend has it that the house is haunted by a young woman who was jilted at the altar and subsequently hanged herself from the stairway. Her ghost is said to appear in the mirrors of the ballroom.



DINING ROOM

Suspended over an American Empire table from Wilkinson's grandmother is an old brass chandelier stuffed with dried flowers and grasses.

KITCHEN

An antique wooden ladder hangs from the ceiling and displays an array of vintage baskets.

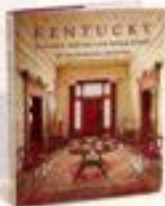


Evolution of the House

January built a modest Federal farmhouse consisting of a two-story, three-bay core flanked by a couple of two-bay, single-story wings. In 1840, when Gibson bought it, he hired local architects John McMurtry and Thomas Lewinski to make the house grander. They brought the wings to two stories and added an unquestionably Southern, antebellum-style central portico supported by four Ionic columns. The architects also added cast-iron and terra-cotta window moldings and iron balconies, which were made at local foundries.

All About the Details

The stupendous gilt-framed overmantel mirrors throughout the main rooms have been in the house since the 1840s, including the ones that eccentrically stretch out to valances over the windows. Handsome mantelpieces downstairs are made of white statuary marble. A beautiful Federal archway survives in an upstairs hall. Windows have women's names scratched in the corners; Wilkinson surmises that past female residents might have done this with their diamond rings.



Learn more about John and his home in *Kentucky: Historic Houses and Horse Farms of Bluegrass Country*, \$60; monacellpress.com

MEET THE OWNER

What led you to life in a landmark?

I grew up in an old home in rural Kentucky. Since then, I could never get used to the hermetically sealed comforts of a newly built house.

What's most endearing about the house?

Its 12½-foot ceilings and nearly 9-foot-high windows and doors are perfect for a 6'4" antique dealer who constantly shifts furniture around.

Which room is your favorite?

My unconventional kitchen is 40 feet long and 10 feet wide—a sunporch stretching across the back of the house. There may be little room for mundane cabinets, but oh, the light!

Has the home's history influenced your lifestyle?

So far I've refused to install central air conditioning. I cool the house the old-fashioned way. The twice-daily opening and closing of shutters and the adjusting of double-hung window sashes, plus a few strategically placed fans, all make the house almost bearable in the summer.

What lesson have you learned living here?

Patience. Trying to do everything at once and as soon as possible is a big mistake. Once you strip away the patina, there's not much chance of bringing it back.



LOUISIANA PLANTATION

NEW ROADS LA

NAME OF HOUSE: The Lejeune House

YEAR BUILT: Circa 1800

ARCHITECT: Unknown, most likely designed by its first owner, François Samson

STYLE: Louisiana Creole with Neoclassic elements added later

CURRENT OWNERS: Randy Harelson, a horticulturist, and Richard Gibbs, an architect

Built on the banks of the False River in the early 1800s by François Samson, the home thrived as the epicenter of a 500-acre indigo and tobacco plantation until the 1830s. The Lejeune family bought it then and remained until the 1970s, when they sold the house to Michael Rollinger and Mary Champagne, the well-known society editor of the *Baton Rouge Morning Advocate*. The couple hired the Southern master architect A. Hays Town to restore and renovate the house, but it is unknown whether any of his plans were actually carried out. Today, Richard Gibbs and Randy Harelson own the house and its 2½ acres—the rest was developed as part of the town of New Roads, Louisiana.

If These Walls Could Talk

The oddest thing about the house is probably the family who lived in it the longest. The Lejeunes had 12 children, 11 of whom lived to adulthood. None ever married.

"They're famous for having always stayed with the house," says Randy. "They would have to do serious



LIVING ROOM

Randy and Richard painted the living room a warm white based on the earliest paint color their scrapings revealed. The light blue of the coffered ceiling was a more whimsical choice. An Early American sofa is covered in dusty rose silk velvet.



kinds of work and come back. When they were here, they would all eat around the big dining table and would put a quarter under their plates to pay for groceries and upkeep. They kept to themselves and were known for living in near silence, almost as if this were a convent."

Evolution of the House

It was originally a four-room structure when built by François Samson, a planter and soldier who fought in the American Revolution. He owned the entire 500 acres. At some point, the original hipped roof

burned and was replaced with a gabled one. The house grew as its porches were enclosed. Other rooms were added until it reached its current size of 14 rooms.

All About the Details

The fanciest downstairs rooms have cypress-paneled walls and cypress ceilings. Doors have inset panels and baseboards so that when closed, all of the woodwork in the room appears continuous. The living room is done in boiserie, a French-style carved wooden paneling, and it has a coffered ceiling.

MEET THE OWNERS

What led you to life in a landmark?

College experiences. When I [Randy] was at LSU, I lived in a former orphanage called the Goat Castle, where the quirkier people rented. Richard bought and renovated an 1840s Greek Revival at age 21 and did all the work with his Rhode Island School of Design classmates.

What do you like best about your home?

Twelve exterior French doors! Our 300-year-old live oak is even more enchanting when viewed through old, wavy glass windows.

Critics say older homes are money pits. Do you agree?

Everyone spends his money on what he considers valuable. Old houses do require authentic materials and appropriate craftsmanship, which costs more. Understand that, and belly up to the bar.

How do you decorate a 200-year-old home?

Use materials that are true to the period of the house: natural textiles, wood, clay, and glass. And candlelight! It's as beautiful in the 21st century as it was in the 19th.





RICHMOND ROW HOUSE

RICHMOND, VA

NAME OF HOUSE: The Alexander Walker House

YEAR BUILT: 1855; expanded in 1859

ARCHITECT: Unknown; at the time, Southern houses were often designed by their owners.

STYLE: Greek Revival, with Regency-inspired iron balconies and Italianate cornices

CURRENT OWNER: William "Bill" Crosby, senior architect, Virginia's Historic Preservation Office

Slave auctioneer Robert Alvis constructed half the house in 1855, but financial losses forced him to sell to tobacco merchant Alexander Walker, who expanded it into a center-hall residence on the cusp of the Civil War in 1859. During the war, Union troops stayed in the house after Richmond fell. From 1905 until 1934, it served as an orphanage. After that, it became the Young Men's Club of Virginia. In the 1970s, it was purchased and renovated back into a private home, which Bill Crosby acquired in 1988.

If These Walls Could Talk

Local lore has it that Abraham Lincoln visited the front porch on April 4, 1865, the day after Union forces captured Richmond, a pivotal turning point in the war. At that time, the city was the capital of the Confederacy. In 1905, another President, Theodore Roosevelt, a champion of orphanages, made an appearance at the house. In recent times, actor James Spader toured the home when he was considering leasing it for his family during the filming of the movie *Lincoln*.





LIVING ROOM

Webster, a wirehaired fox terrier, sits in the front parlor overlooking East Franklin Street. The Empire sofa and upholstered bench have a relaxed air. "You can't hurt them," Bill says.

FACADE

Bill Crosby leans against the original iron fence enclosing his home, which has an English basement and a raised main floor that helps get air and light into the rooms.



Evolution of the House

In the 1970s, a new homeowner connected an outbuilding to the home by enclosing a rear galley porch to create space for a kitchen, butler's pantry, and sitting room. Other than that addition, the Alexander Walker House retains its 1859 floor plan. Master plasterer Bill MacArthur recently restored the original wall finishes and cornices.

All About the Details

Double-hung windows are tall enough to walk through. Twelve-foot-high ceilings and heavy cornices give stature to double parlors that can be closed off with pocket doors. Twin Carrara marble mantels from Italy feature lavish grape and vine carvings. The kitchen still has two large fireplaces for cooking. Original heart-pine floorboards, tall baseboards, panel doors, glass transom lights, heart-pine windows, and window casings all survive too. A second-floor bedroom window opens onto the rear portico to allow the occupant

a bird's-eye view of the James River. This window has a low, in-swinging jib door—a type of Neoclassic portal that was used by Thomas Jefferson at Monticello and liberally entrenched in Virginia architecture. After 150 years, the jib door still works.

Retrofitting a Renovation

Originally slave quarters, the kitchen was renovated and adjoined to the main house in the 1970s. Bill went in and stripped off the newer finishes to reveal old maple floors and a planked ceiling, which he replaced with an exact replica of the original. He also hid the appliances behind decorative paneling copied

**"CLASSICAL
ARCHITECTURE HAS
ALWAYS SPOKEN TO ME.
IT'S BEEN 20 CENTURIES
IN THE MAKING.
WHY WOULD WE EVER
LEAVE IT BEHIND?"
BILL CROSBY**

from the house's formal rooms. Except for the central island's worktable, Bill skipped proper countertops. The tops of pine cupboards are used as work surfaces instead, with storage underneath. His collection of creamware—none of it perfect and all of it mended—is displayed over a granite farm sink deep enough to bathe his dogs.

Decorating for Then and Now

Simplicity is Bill's creed. Whisper-quiet palettes and bare windows let the architecture's vocabulary do most of the talking in each room. Farrow & Ball's rich off-white color, Pointing, coats the dining room and living room walls. Over time, Bill worked to amass a collection of Second Empire, Duncan Phyfe, and other Neoclassic furnishings. These pieces, which date from the same period as the home, tend to have the necessary proportions to fill the rooms. Pieces from other eras tend to look a bit diminutive under the 12-foot ceiling.



Kitchen



Jib door





MEET THE OWNER

What's most endearing about the house?

It has a presence with its big, restrained rooms; the soaring ceilings; the bold, running plaster cornices. They're spacious and airy, with pleasing light from morning to night.

How is your neighborhood?

It's a gorgeous historic district, St. John's Church, named after its most dominant feature, St. John's Episcopal Church, where Patrick Henry delivered his famous "Give me liberty or give me death" speech.

What's the key to preserving a landmark?

Proper maintenance. Do this and you won't need to restore anything. It's also important to know what to do and what not to do.

Give us an example.

If you're lucky enough to have heart-pine windows, you'll want to repair and maintain what you've got. Heart pine won't rot, and it gives the building character. Never replace it with vinyl or fiberglass—retain it at any cost!

What is life like living on the National Register?

It's an honor with one tiny inconvenience: I can't go out and fetch the newspaper in my pajamas anymore. This home attracts trolley tours, and I never know when tourists with cameras might be stopped out front! ●

DINING ROOM

A shouldered architrave surrounds the doorway and transom, and a substantial cover molding traces the room. The 1810 English Regency dining table is from a North Carolina antiques shop, and the armchairs are from Bill's grandmother.