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LIFE



A HAPPY HOUSE

Real life at the 'Wedding Crashers' cottage

By Mary Lou Baker. Photography by Brough Schamp.



Marylanders who saw the hit flick "Wedding Crashers" were feverish in their quest for information on just where the movie was filmed. There was general agreement that the scene for the reception was the Inn at Perry Cabin; its manicured grounds and waterfront location made it obvious. But where was that magnificent mansion, the "residence" of the family who unknowingly welcomed in the brazen wedding crashers?

Amateur sleuths eventually identified the site as Ellenborough, a historic estate in the Baileys Neck area of Talbot County, its lush acreage overlooking Peachblossom Creek, which feeds into the Tred Avon River. It was here, in 1860, that Matthew Tilghman Goldsborough built a plantation house and christened it in honor of his daughter, Eleanor.

The present structure dates back to 1935, when the original was razed and replaced with a stately nine-bedroom residence and multiple outbuildings.

When Ellenborough Estate's two-bedroom caretaker's cottage and adjacent kennels and barns came on the market in 1993, Washingtonians Susette and Mike Windsor fell in love with its idyllic location. Looking for respite from their busy professional lives, they bought the property as a weekend home and embarked on a yearlong project to blend a Dutch colonial with a two-story addition under the same roofline.

Michael, who owned a commercial construction company in Tysons Corner, Va., was the general contractor, commuting from the family's Potomac residence to devote Monday mornings and Friday afternoons to his challenging task. He hired Oxford architect Tim Kearns and turned to local carpenters, electricians and plumbers for the job of transforming an ugly duckling into a swan.

"We spent weekends in the original house right away," Susette says. "Back then, we never had a decorator—just bought some new fur-



niture and used what we had. The dog kennel part of the structure was what required a major renovation, although the entire house needed heat and air conditioning, upgraded electrical work and new plumbing—you name it and it needed it.”

Kearns shared the Windsors' vision of a light-filled year-round residence large enough to accommodate their three then-teenage children. Ten deeply recessed dormer windows were a transformational feature of Kearns' plan to convert the kennels and garage into a foyer and central living space. Nowhere are the results more magical than in the living and dining rooms, where daylight and moonlight are invited in through the dormers. Placed at the upper regions of the vaulted ceiling, they draw the eye upward toward two half-open doors salvaged from the original kennel and now inserted into a wall of the spacious second-floor master bedroom.

A year after a brain tumor claimed Michael's life in May 2010, Susette decided to redecorate and declutter the house. She engaged Jamie Merida, the charismatic owner of Bountiful in Easton, to help her give a new look to the residence. “I wanted to change the look of the whole house, replace the Orientals and heavy furniture with something lighter and more casual,” says Susette, a friend and frequent client of Merida's home furnishings and design store.

“We wanted to make her house happy,” says Merida, who has decorated homes up and down the East Coast, with a core clientele on the Eastern Shore. Amanda Friend, the lead designer on this project, was intimately involved with the Ellenborough Cottage makeover. She worked her magic around Susette's antiques and family treasures, adding new upholstered pieces and using coordinating paint colors to lighten up the overall atmosphere of the house.

Blue and white is the dominant color scheme in the downstairs living areas, inspired by the collection of antique Staffordshire china Susette inherited from her grandmother. A pair of Staffordshire lamps repeats the distinctive color of the plates, which are prominently displayed on the shelves of a massive antique heart-of-pine hutch from Ireland that dominates the dining room. Its matching buffet fills the opposite wall and a stunning crystal chandelier that once belonged to Susette's mother-in-law hangs proudly over the round pine dining table. Windsor chairs are made comfortable with thick cushions covered with blue and white patterned Ikat fabric.

Two “pass throughs” cut into the kitchen's weight-bearing wall open into the adjoining rooms, enabling visual and verbal communication between the cook and her guests—an idea for which Susette credits the architect. “This way, I can be part of what's going on and not feel isolated when I'm cooking, although the kitchen seems to be the favorite family gathering place,” she says.

After 14 years of living with the original kitchen, which featured dark wood cabinets and avocado green appliances, Susette and Mike did a complete makeover five years ago. Susette's dream kitchen combines a traditional square kitchen and an adjacent cabinet-lined galley with double sinks and a wine refrigerator that leads to a mudroom and side entrance. The 500-pound solid maple butcher block, once a fixture of Susette's family's country store in North Carolina, is a treasured object. “It is loved and used daily,” she says, adding that it presently is in its third family kitchen.

The two-story living room is perhaps the most dramatic feature of Ellenborough Cottage. According to the architect,





this space was once used as a boat house, with a door big enough for storing small craft. That opening now is a handsome working fireplace with a shining marble façade and hearth beneath a beautiful carved mantle.

Hanging in a place of honor over the fireplace is an antique photograph of a competitor in the original America's Cup race—a treasure Jamie found for Susette. Oversized armchairs upholstered in vibrant blue fabric flank the fireplace, which faces a sofa covered in white sail cloth and accented with white pillows appliquéd in a navy blue crab design. This is a spacious room, big enough to serve a dual purpose. In front of windows overlooking the water, Amanda replaced a sofa with a rustic pine farm table and white wooden chairs—now a popular place for breakfast and lunch.

A pair of lamps with warm apricot bases inspired the vibrant color scheme of the large downstairs bedroom, part of the original cottage. Accessed through French doors curtained for privacy with a gauzy silk fabric, it features a working fireplace and a large bathroom equipped with both a Jacuzzi and sauna. The other room on this side of the house is a library, its shelves lined with books, as well as a display of antique duck decoys that originally belonged to Michael's great-grandfather. Both rooms open into a screened porch.

Amanda did a masterful job of decorating the three upstairs bedrooms, each with its own personality. A regal antique mahogany four poster bed—its vibrant blue and white shell coverlet matching two upholstered side chairs—is set on a blue and white striped rug in the largest room. Spring green is the color of the spread on a queen-size bed, with coordinating pillow shams. A wonderfully whimsical patterned rug and flower prints on the wall add interest. Twin beds and a trundle announce a "children's room" done up in buttercream yellow and coral. Susette's Grandmother Mattie Adams' antique maple rocker, reupholstered in white chenille with blue trim, has a place of honor near the window.

One of the most appealing features of this house is the open porch that stretches the length of the waterside. Amanda took full advantage of its size by furnishing it with wonderful white wicker and splashing it with color in accessories, as well as a long swath of blue and white carpet from Bountiful's flooring department. Susette's two daughters were married under a trellis on the lawn overlooking the boathouse so prominently featured in "Wedding Crashers."

Susette is active in the Talbot County community, serving on the vestry at Oxford's Church of the Holy Trinity. She also is a generous contributor to the church's Michael B. Windsor Capital Campaign Fund, which was established in September 2010 in Mike's memory with the funds to be used for maintenance of the church buildings and grounds. As another way to keep Mike's memory alive, Susette and her family established a golf tournament last year, raising \$21,000 to benefit the Brain Tumor Institute at Children's National Medical Center. They will hold the second annual tournament again this year.

These days, with her daughters Michele and Ashley married and the mothers of John (7), Michael (4), Mae (4) and Lily (1), Susette is surrounded by a growing family that also includes her son, John, and two sons-in-law, Jorge and Whit. Ellenborough Cottage, with its broad green lawns to play on, an outdoor pool for swimming and a dock for crabbing and fishing, is a joyful place to play—and live.

The fresh new look of the home's interior and the privacy of the property are what Susette loves best about living there. "I love waking up to nature—birds singing, geese honking and the wonderful views from all the windows," she says. "Jamie and Amanda did a beautiful job of transforming Ellenborough Cottage into a casual but elegant setting for family get-togethers and a wonderful place for me to be."

As we said goodbye, Susette paused to show us a bird's nest built inside the decorative wreath on the front door. We stood on tiptoe to peer into the straw house, just in time to hear a peep as a baby bird emerged from its shell—another creature finding refuge at this very special place on Maryland's Eastern Shore.