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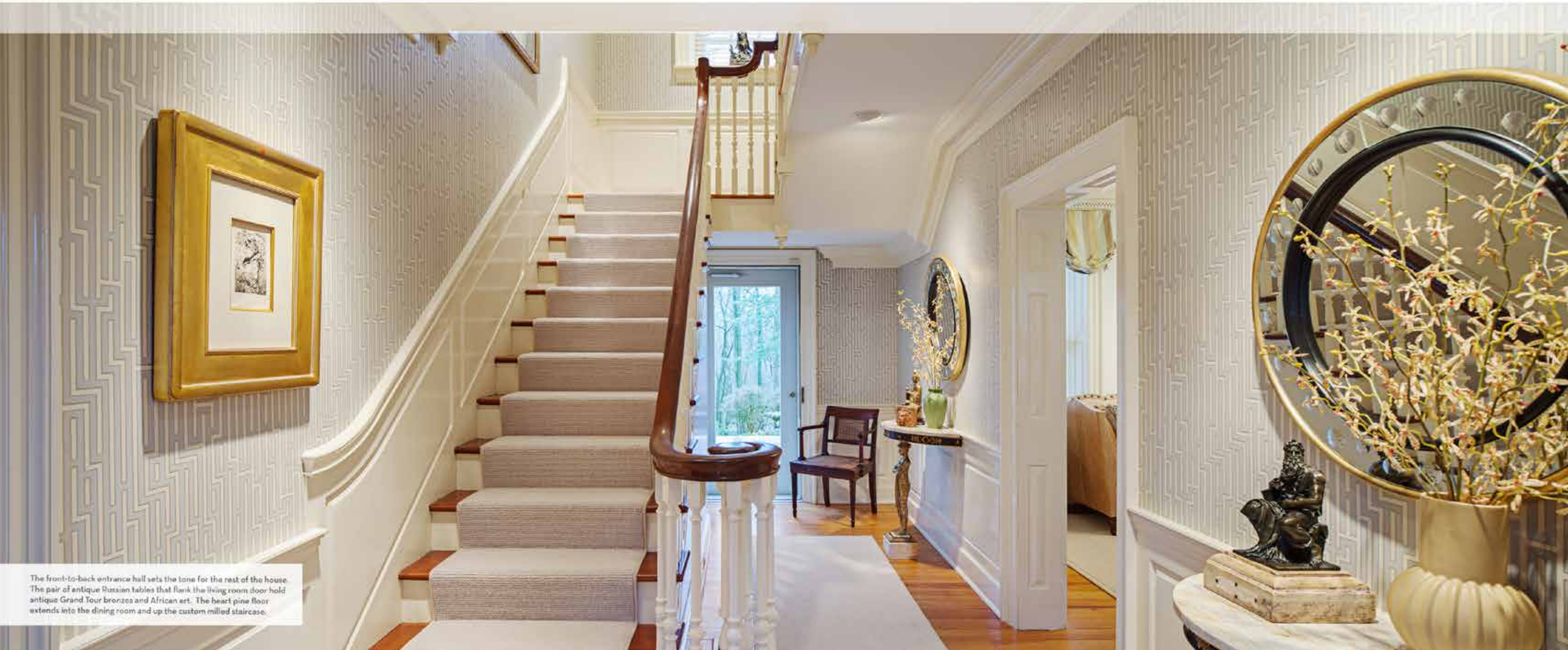
CREATING A HAPPY HOME on the EASTERN SHORE

By Carol Sorgen PHOTOGRAPHY BY J. Brough Schamp

Jamie Merida took a circuitous route to finding his life's work and the house that captured his heart, but today, he's just where he wants to be, professionally and personally, and couldn't be happier.

The son of accomplished fine artists who also ran a gallery and antiques business, Merida grew up in Belgium and Kentucky—which probably goes a long way in explaining his eclectic design sensibilities—but initially took a different path, training to be a concert pianist and earning his degree in music from the prestigious Peabody Conservatory in Baltimore.

"But by the time I graduated from Peabody, I didn't want to look at a piano," Merida chuckles now. He switched gears, began a graduate program in business at Johns Hopkins University, decided to become an entrepreneur and managed several pizza shops in Baltimore to learn the business—"That was nuts!"—and worked in public relations. None of it "took" and when his parents needed a hand with their art and antiques business, he returned home and there found his way back to his aesthetic roots.



The front-to-back entrance hall sets the tone for the rest of the house. The pair of antique Russian tables that flank the living room door hold antique Grand Tour bronzes and African art. The heart pine floor extends into the dining room and up the custom milled staircase.



After one too many traveling antiques shows, though, Merida was ready to settle down. He bought a home in Easton, and in 1997, opened Bountiful, his once-small home furnishings boutique that through the years has “morphed” into an 18,000-square-foot full-service showroom and design center that draws clients from the entire East Coast. “Some people are just born to sell,” says Merida, by way of explaining his success. “I love to find things that people want to buy!”

A dozen years ago, Merida’s loyal—and ever-growing—customers began to request his help with their interior design projects. At the time,

the shop had no design studio and he no formal interior design training. But, intrigued and flattered, he decided to see what he could make of it.

Today, Merida’s design portfolio features high-end homes and vacation residences in Maryland, Virginia, Florida, New York, Idaho, and Europe. His growing roster of commercial work includes the Tidewater Inn and The Inn at 202 Dover in Easton, as well as the popular Eastern Shore restaurants Scossa and The Colosseum.

“Responding to a broad range of client needs really is exciting,” Merida says. “You can never coast when you’re faced with new design challenges all of the time.”



LEFT: The living room showcases Boxwood Hill’s original hand-carved, figured moldings and baseboards, 12-inch dentil crown molding, and built-in cabinetry. Merida painted all of Boxwood Hill’s millwork a high gloss white to create a dramatic backdrop to his art collection and furniture.

LEFT, BELOW: Boxwood Hill sits at the top of a mile-long lane that snakes through seven acres of woodland, punctuated by hundreds of azaleas and rhododendrons. Over 50 huge boxwoods frame the walkways and extensive gardens.

One of his biggest challenges—or perhaps more accurately, opportunities—has been the design of his own home, Boxwood Hill, which he purchased in 2005.

“I wasn’t really looking for a new house,” Merida recalls, but after seeing a magazine advertisement, he called his realtor and they went for a drive—crossing county lines from Talbot to Caroline. “We came up the long driveway and I turned to my realtor and said, ‘If there’s a house at the end of this, I’ll take it.’”

Sited on seven acres on the crest of a hill looking over the Choptank River, Boxwood Hill is a classic Tidewater Colonial that looks as if it has centuries of history behind it. To the contrary, it was, in fact, built in the mid-1960s by Caroline County furniture-maker and historian Buck Adams, who built the house by hand and by himself, taking five years to complete the job.

Adams, who had created historic installations at the Smithsonian, was a stickler for authenticity. “The story goes,” says Merida, “that he even built a kiln on the property to fire hand-formed bricks.” Whether that was, in fact, true, the rest of the 2,400-square-foot house reflects Adams’s attention to detail, from hand-carved, figured molding, woodwork, and cabinetry, to formal rooms that feature 12-inch dentil crown molding and deep baseboards, to built-in cabinets, heart pine floors, and a fireplace in every room.





Boxwood Hill's understated elegance yields to comfort in the kitchen, where an antique pastry table serves as a center island. Baskets under the island keep kitchen essentials neatly stowed away. The brick floor and pieces from Merida's art collection add warmth.

Only two owners had lived at Boxwood Hill before Merida moved in, and the home had been maintained "to within an inch of its life," says Merida. That didn't mean, though, that he didn't want to make the house more functional for himself and his partner, Vincent Bochun.

The bathrooms and brick-floored kitchen—which features a reproduction antique French pastry table as a center island, stainless steel appliances, high-gloss antique-white painted cabinets, and White Diamond granite countertops—underwent a thorough upgrading, but in the rest of the house, much of Merida's work was cosmetic. "In a sense, it's a hard house to work with because the architecture dictates what you can do," says Merida. "When you have a chair rail in every room, for example, there's only so large a painting you can put above it!"

Though Merida could easily have turned the interior of the home into a reflection of its formal exterior, that was never his intention. "This isn't a stage set," he says. It is rather, first and foremost, a home for himself and Bochun, their three rescued pets—two Old English Sheepdogs and a cat—and the many friends they entertain (at a dining table that seats no more than eight, so dinners are always on an intimate scale).

Because he's surrounded by color all day long, Merida has kept to a subtle, almost monochromatic color palette at home, with shades of taupe, pale blue, and antique white providing visual flow among the rooms.



The subdued tones also serve as an effective backdrop for Merida's collection of fine art, bronzes, African masks, antique furniture (much of it given to him by his parents)—and the baby grand piano that has followed him wherever he goes since he was 14.

"I don't buy much myself," Merida says, calling himself a "spare collector."

"I'm not a cluttered person," he continues. And though there are a variety of styles—from abstract expressionist to Southeast Asian art—co-mingling in a period house, "Somehow, it all works," says Merida. "My taste is diverse, but there is continuity."

Upstairs, a former maid's room situated under the eaves is now used for guests (there is also a 600-square-foot one-bedroom guest house on the property). The master suite consists of two large rooms—a bedroom and a library—overlooking the river and a stream, as well as a newly remodeled master bath.

Merida is still tinkering with the home. His next project is designing a family room, located off the kitchen, which will take advantage of the home's gracious views.

But overall, Merida feels that he has hit his stride both at work and at home. Professionally, he is enthusiastic about his shop, his growing design portfolio, the interior design book he is writing, and his regular appearances on NPR's show, "Boomer Babes." "Now that I have found my niche, I want to explore every aspect of it," he says.

And what better place to do that than in the private space he has created for himself and his family. Simply put, he says, "This is a happy house."

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