

HIGHLANDS *Hideaway*

A historic cottage in Highlands, North Carolina, offers a Birmingham family the solitude of a mountain retreat right in the middle of town.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY GUY HOWARD / SHUTTERSTOCK; STYLING BY JEAN-LOUIS GONN

When Jan Wase first saw the property, she was in the car. "I was driving on Main Street in Old Edwards, and I saw this house," she says. "I was like, 'That's a really nice house.'"

Jeremy Cotkern, the architect who designed the house, says the house is a "great example of a cottage." He says the house is a "great example of a cottage." He says the house is a "great example of a cottage."



Designer Jan Wase chose the house to renovate because she was looking for a house in the middle of town. "I didn't want to be in the middle of town," she says. "I wanted a house that was in the middle of town." She says the house is a "great example of a cottage." She says the house is a "great example of a cottage."

The address may be Main Street, but you'd never know it. Tucked behind a forest of century-old rhododendrons and native spruce, this unassuming cottage is shielded from the bustle and bustle of Highlands. "You feel like you are in an enchanted forest," architect Jeremy Cotkern says. "Trees arch over the driveway, and there's a little brook in the backyard. It's a beautiful piece of property."

That privacy, paired with the cottage's prime location, is exactly what interior designer Jan Wase loved about the dilapidated home the first time she saw it. "It feels like you are away from everything," she says. "But the middle of downtown is right out the front door."

When Jan walked through that front door, she could see nothing but potential. "I knew from the



Just inside the front door, the dining room is purified for many purposes—relaxing by the fire, reading in a comfy nook, playing games, or dining at the central table. “We rescued the owner’s old wooden table and added stools and a bench for seating,” Jan says. A warmer light fixture by Visual Comfort “is unobtrusive and clean but gives a lot of light,” she says. “We had no need for can lights in the ceiling.”



moment I walked in and saw the worn pine floors and tongue-and-groove paneling on the walls that it could be a wonderful home,” she says. “I told my clients, ‘You have to do this. It has so much potential to be amazing.’ But they weren’t immediately convinced.” Even Jeremy needed a moment to see just what he says were “40-plus years of neglect and hoarding” by the previous owners. “I expected a whole litter of cats to come running out!” he says. “It really was a sad little house.”

With some persistence from Jan, however, Jeremy agreed to do some sketches. And thanks to Jan’s encouragement and vision, the clients eventually came around. “It would have been so easy to tear it down and start over,” Jeremy says. “But we didn’t do that. Once the clients were on board, they wanted it done right.”

TOP: Custom cabinet and soapstone countertops outfit the kitchen, while a bench offers additional storage. **Just past the island, the family room stretches to the back of the house.** **RIGHT:** A custom sofa, a Gobby coffee table, and a wool rug (not to fit around the fireplace hearth) complete the small square den. The frames showcase family photos.



Better, Not Bigger

Architect Jeremy Corkern reimagined the cottage's footprint and floor plan without adding on a single square foot. "You can sleep two families comfortably," interior designer Jan Ware says of the five-bedroom, four-bath home. "We were able to maintain the integrity of the little house while also equipping it for a family of six and their guests." Adds Jeremy, "This house embodies the idea of keeping the size small but the quality high."



making small but powerful changes to the floor plan, reusing original materials when possible and brightening up the shadowy interiors.

The first floor's organization, consisting of a soaring two-story main room with a massive stone fireplace, a kitchen, a family room, and a sunroom, as well as two bedrooms and a full bath remained much the same. A new master suite was created from the former closet. Upstairs, a long, narrow room became a bedroom with an ensuite bath. In addition, the designers made more space for overnight guests by carving out a bunk room. The second-floor den, anchored by the central fireplace, and the original bathroom remained.

The pine floors and dark-stained paneling that first spoke to Jan were preserved and, in areas that didn't have them, mimicked. "We reused the old stain and had to patch and match a lot of the distressed flooring," Jeremy says. The original fireplace—crafted with stacked local stones—was repaired and rebuilt when needed. "We tried to keep the house as authentic as possible," says the architect.

For even more authenticity, the design team returned the windows to their original, larger size so that light now pours into the once-gloomy cottage. "We needed as much light as we could get," Jeremy says. With that in mind, he specified clerestory windows to wrap the top of the main room and also created a front-door wall of almost solid glass. Additional walls of windows and French doors in the sunroom and family room allow light to brighten every space, even the windowless interior kitchen.

To enhance the now-luminous interiors, Jan swathed every wall and ceiling in a soft white hue (Sherwin-Williams Natural Choice, SW7011) that bounces and magnifies the natural light. "I wanted to bring the exterior inside with a soothing, natural feel," she says of the subdued color scheme. And to complete the charm and comfort of the cottage, she added thoughtful furnishings focused on restful relaxation—the perfect finishing touch.

RESOURCES Interior Design: Jan Ware, Jan Ware Design, janwaredesign.com; Architect: Jeremy Corkern, Jeremy Corkern Studio, jeremycorkernstudio.com; Builder: Jim Robinson, Design South Builders, LLC, designsouthbuilders.com



The Mountains Are Calling

"Highlands is an amazing little city," says designer Jan Ware. "It is a walkable town with a resort and spa, award-winning restaurants, fun shops, and lots to do outdoors," she says.

STAY Old Edwards Inn is a resort with a beautiful bar, two pools, and a spa. Situated in the heart of downtown, the inn includes luxury guest rooms, suites, cottages, and vacation homes.

SHOP Mountain Fresh Grocery is an upscale market offering a butcher, bakery, deli, and grill. "They make wood-fired pizzas in front of you," Jan says. "And they have an incredible wine selection—one of the best in the country."

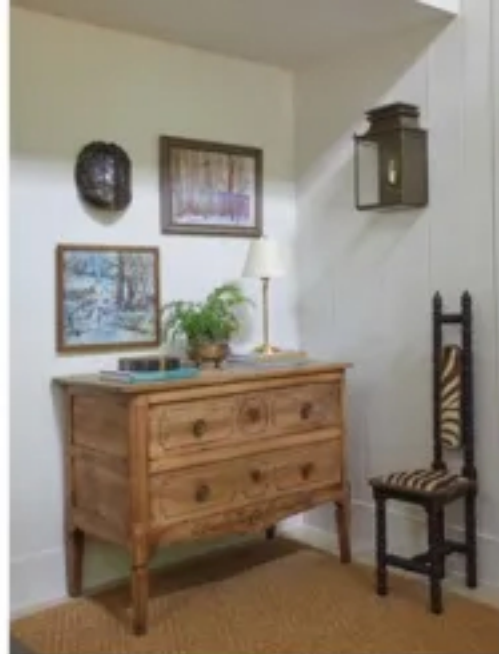
EAT Restaurant Pastelli offers a refined Italian menu. "The food is amazing—a personal favorite," says Jan. "Be sure to order an old-fashioned martini."

PLAY Get some fresh air on the Whiteside Mountain National Recreation Trail, a 2-mile loop easy enough for the whole family. Venture into Nantahala National Forest for hiking, fly-fishing, camping, white water rafting and more. Or tee off on the spectacular 18-hole golf course at Old Edwards Club.



"I wanted to bring the exterior inside and bring a soothing, natural feel," Jan says of her subdued color scheme. "I even took lichen off a tree as our basic palette for the house."

-JAN MARE



ABOVE: Just off the kitchen, a round table surrounded by discovered teak and a built-in banquette occupies the breakfast room—the original sunroom. Windows wrap across the exterior wall, and French doors connect the day space to the rear screened porch. OPPOSITE, TOP LEFT: There are no many antiques in the house, but Jan found this chest at an antique auction, says Jan. "The little chest was a last-minute flea market find." Antiques framed art pieces and a terrace shelf hang above the chest. OPPOSITE, BOTTOM RIGHT: In one of the original main-level bedrooms, Jan showed a pair of twin beds in natural linen hues. Animal print pillows stand out against the neutral bedding.