

BEFORE & AFTER

Haute Hideaway

Boutique owner Guilds Bennett facelifts an Avondale cottage with chic, East-meets-West Coast flair



AFTER

To say that native Charlestonian Guilds Bennett was less than impressed when she first laid eyes on her future home in Avondale would be a modest assessment. “I can’t explain how bad it was,” says Bennett, who returned to Charleston in 2004 after 10 years away, a stint capped by three years in Los Angeles. “It was a mess.”

Still, she knew she wanted to make her home away from downtown, separate from the hustle and bustle of the busy shopping district and her business life—she kept house within walking distance of

Wanting to maintain the structural integrity of the living room, Bennett focused on refinishing the hardwood floors and painting over damaged brick.



BEFORE

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The kitchen was a closed-off, outdated affair at the back end of the cottage before Bennett's team knocked out the wall that once separated it from the adjacent dining room. From there, they installed teak and holly veneer countertops, modern stainless appliances, brick pavers, and lower cabinetry.

chic King Street clothing boutique Miostile, which Bennett opened a couple years back. "It was too much," she recalls. "I needed to find a way to get away from it all."

Meanwhile, the up-and-coming community of Avondale, just across the river, appealed to her. With its recent outcropping of trendy stores and restaurants, "I saw it as Charleston's version of L.A.'s Los Feliz neighborhood. In a way, it reminds me of the Old Village where I grew up," she says.

It's also where she found a 900-plus square-foot 1950s bungalow in need of a little TLC. Up for a challenging project, she enlisted the help of her cousin, Brett Elrod

of C. Brett Elrod Construction Company, and friend and interior designer Ginger Brewton of Ginger Brewton Interiors, and jumped in with both feet. Together, the

This view of a cramped corner of the kitchen, prior to removal of the separating wall, contrasts sharply with Bennett's newly appointed space outfitted with organic materials and simple artwork.



IN THE BATHROOM, EXISTING YELLOW TILE WAS REGLAZED WHITE AS A WAY OF FINISHING OFF THE ROOM'S CRISP OVERHAUL WITHOUT OVEREXTENDING THE BUDGET.



The cottage's sole bathroom was in dire need of refurbishment, with a backdrop of dated yellow tiles and drab porcelain headlining the space. Bennett has since replaced the flooring with white mosaic tiles, added a coat of paint, and replaced both the sink and toilet. With one eye on her budget, however, Bennett decided against replacing the bathtub and butter-colored tiles in favor of simply reglazing them white for a clean, fresh finish to the room.

of the project. Elrod used excess materials from other jobs and brought in several items from salvage shops. The team also saved as much of the original elements as possible, often giving something old a new coat of paint, and, in turn, new life.

For example, the bathroom may have been treated to a new toilet and sink, but existing yellow tile was simply reglazed white as a way of finishing off the room's crisp overhaul without overextending the budget. The brick fireplace in the living room was also given a fresh white wash in a cost-conscious effort to hide blemishes, while the awnings outdoors underwent a few minor repairs and were freshened up with Charleston Green paint. Also worth salvaging were the dwelling's original hardwood floors hidden beneath old carpeting.

The cookspace, however, needed more than simple cosmetics. "The kitchen was

crew turned this "mess" into a sanctuary fit for its resident fashionista.

Cost-Conscious Construction

While she was eager to make her new home live up to everything she had

dreamed, Bennett knew reality dictated a modest budget, which forced the trio to get creative. While there were a few things she could not skimp on (like an HVAC system and all new wiring), there was plenty of wiggle room with the rest



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very claustrophobic," says Bennett. "Ginger and I had to figure out how to maximize the space beyond just aesthetics."

The first order of business was knocking out the wall between the dining room and kitchen to create a bar. Elrod fashioned a new countertop designed to look like the hull of a yacht, using a teak and holly veneer (with plywood underneath to reduce the cost by nearly 75 percent) and finished with brick pavers recovered from another job site. He also added lower cabinets from an architectural salvage store and new sink hardware. The original cabinets remained, along with the kitchen sink.

Bennett fashioned an oversized closet out of the formerly unused, unventilated attic space. Set up like a boutique, Bennett incorporated shelving for stacking folded apparel, installed rods for hanging purses and clothing, and fashioned an earring tree out of a window screen.

Dressing Room

The attic was another major undertaking that required a bit of ingenuity. As a hip clothier herself, it was a necessity to have more closet than the small home offered. "I am not practical when it comes to collecting clothes," admits Bennett. "I had to really sit down and think about where I was going to put my wardrobe."



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In an effort to reflect her Lowcountry roots, Bennett opted for a paint color from the Colors of Historic Charleston collection in the guest bedroom (top), where Piazza Blue serves as a pretty backdrop and pairs well with chocolate brown window treatments and a geometrically inspired duvet cover.

With nowhere for her ever-evolving wardrobe to go but up, she and her cousin decided to turn the attic space into a closet,

adding Sheetrock and flooring and equipping it with air conditioning and heat. Elrod then built a stationary ladder, which Bennett climbs every morning to pick out her daily attire. "I've merchandised my closet like my store, using a similar layout and much of the same hardware," she explains. And like any of-the-moment boutique, the space is only "stocked" with what's current, so the choices aren't overwhelming (apparel that doesn't make the cut gets stowed in the actual closets downstairs or in her parents' attic). This way, she can easily thumb through racks of tops, shelves of shoes and handbags, and earrings hung on the screen taken from an old window—all at arm's reach. "This was the best way to keep everything consolidated," she says. "There's a spot for everything up here."

L.A. Meets Charleston

When the time came to furnish Bennett's cottage, the task was narrowed to a simple concept: combining Charleston tradition with her affinity for contemporary style. "Family is so important to me," she says. "I wanted my home to incorporate both my modern side and my Charleston heritage."

"She had a lot of gorgeous, traditional-minded pieces, and we filled in leftover space with more contemporary, transitional choices," says Brewton. Each room is dotted almost equally with family heirlooms and modern touches, much of it culled during her time in L.A. In the living room, for example, an heirloom typewriter and her great uncle's basket—used to carry tomatoes on his farm—are juxtaposed against an abstract painting.

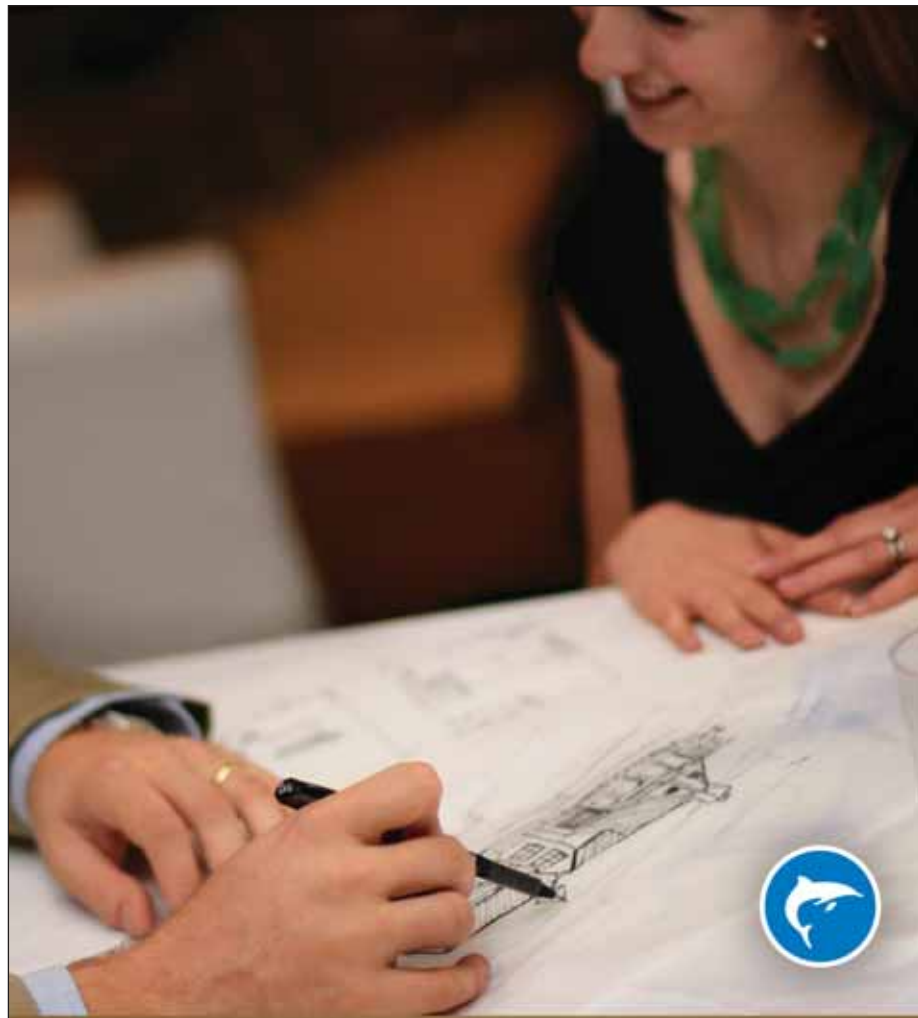


Bennett cleaned up the exterior of the 1950s dwelling, clearing out layers of overgrown ivy and shrubs, adding a fresh coat of white paint, and defining beds for new plantings.

Inside the guest bedroom is another stark contrast that blends seamlessly. Old tin ceiling tiles double as wall art for a nontraditional grouping above an antique rope bed from Bennett's childhood.

Small accents, like coral motifs and a nautical poster, also bring in elements of the coast. Paint colors are an additional nod to place, hailing from the palettes of the Colors of Historic Charleston and the Carolina Lowcountry Collection, and range from Aunt Betty's China and Piazza Blue to subtle Coffered Green.

By L.A. and Lowcountry standards alike, Bennett's chic respite is just that—even if she's doing a little work on the computer or checking her BlackBerry amidst its walls. Just as she hoped, says Bennett, "This house is a little sanctuary for me." ch



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