

by Amanda Lester Trelino photographed by Pieter Estersohn produced by Karen Phillips Irons

# LEAP OF



# FAITH

Designer **Muffie Faith** takes a derelict waterfront home in Mount Pleasant, South Carolina, from haunted to haute







## **The old Gothic Revival house sits high on a bluff**

above the Charleston Harbor and an estuary where the Ashley and Cooper rivers meet. At one time, the home served as a Civil War hospital, and the strategic location in Mount Pleasant, South Carolina, now populated by brown pelicans, dolphins, and shrimp boats, once served as an encampment for soldiers during the Revolutionary and Civil wars. During peacetime, it was occupied seasonally by Charleston residents wealthy enough to afford summer homes across the Cooper River.

*Les Vieilles Demoiselles* by Jules René Hervé dominates the family room with its chocolate-colored silk mohair sofa, mahogany Regency armchairs, and antique Louis Vuitton trunk. To the left of the painting is a Venetian blown-glass bellpull. The pillows are antique suzani, and the barley-twist footstools covered in leather are English. PREVIOUS PAGES: Designer Muffie Faith walks home from the Cooper River with her children, Bobby, 13; Beau, 10; and Stuart, 12. Sable palmettos, Japanese maples, and magnolias thrive in the garden; an antique lantern lights the Gothic Revival entryway.

BELOW: In the living room of the original part of the house, an antique half-moon leather-top coffee table complements seating by Paul Follot and a Hepplewhite triple-back settee with miniature portraits painted on each panel. Faith found the antique French bronze-and-crystal chandelier at a Paris flea market. Her grandmother once owned the Asian pheasant lamps with custom shades and the tables on which they sit. OPPOSITE PAGE: A sea grass rug lends texture to the dining room, which is enveloped in deep-green velvet. "The room is dramatic and fun, and it picks up all the green outdoors," says Faith. Bronze neoclassical candelabras flank the doors, and an antique bronze-and-crystal chandelier hangs overhead. The painting above the fireplace is by William Halsey.



One such home was built in 1850 as a vacation house for a prominent Charleston family. The stately waterfront house eventually fell into a long state of disrepair until designer Muffie Faith happened upon it. Faith, who owns nearby Elizabeth Stuart Design, took one look at the architecture, water views, overgrown gardens, and grand magnolia trees, and she knew to trust her instincts. "From the second I saw it, I fell in love with it," she says. "I remember pulling into the driveway, and here's this incredible house that looked like a haunted house, stripped of everything."

It was Faith's favorite type of challenge. "The house that makes my heart beat fastest is the one with incredible bones that hasn't been loved, so I have the chance to bring life back into it," she says. To help realize her vision, she enlisted an old friend, residential designer Beau Clowney, who has known Faith long enough to understand her style, and the two

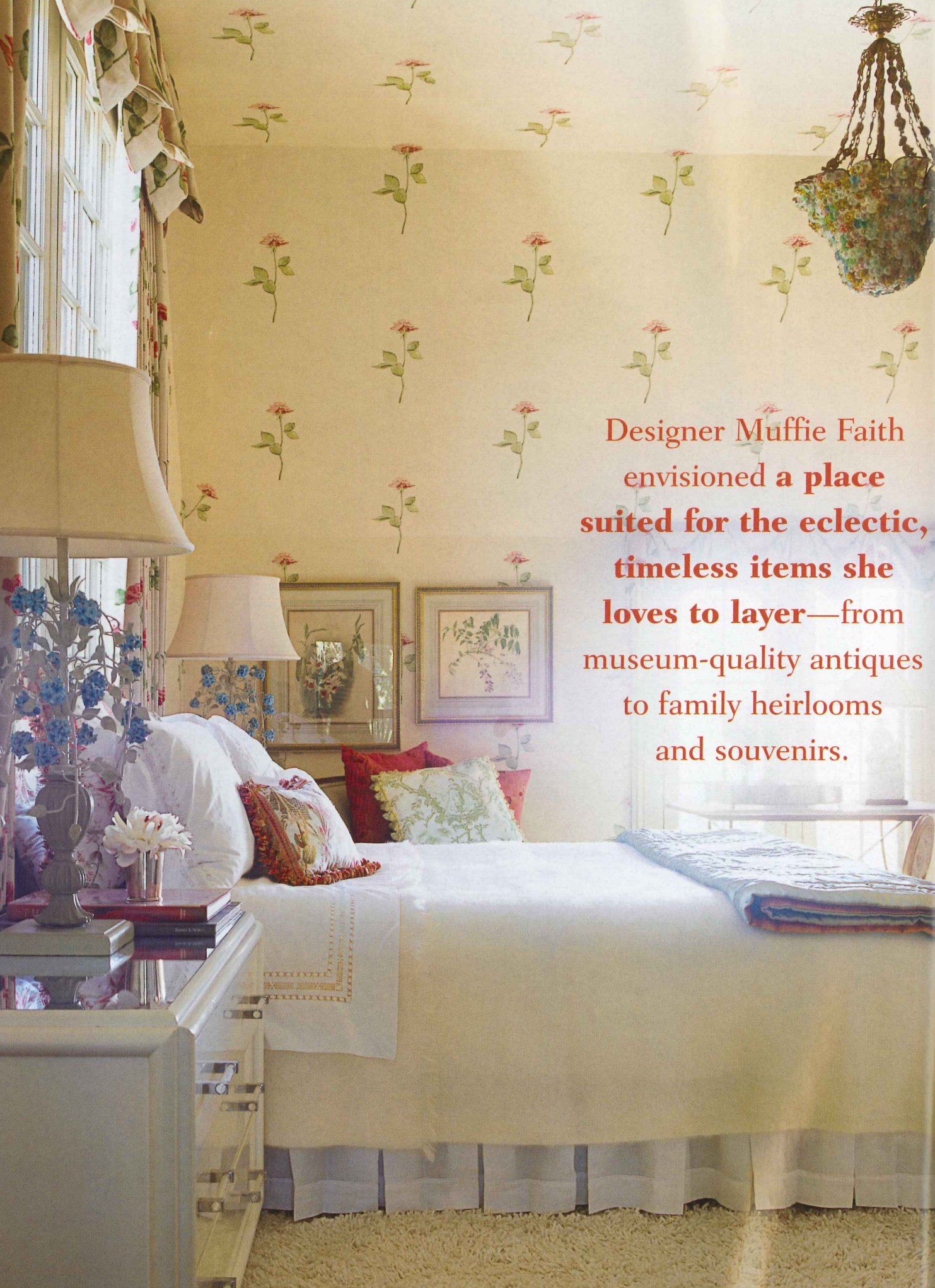






ABOVE: In the master bedroom, a graceful Louis XV writing desk serves as a dressing table beneath a lightly gilded French mirror. Faith found the paintings in Cortona, Italy. Gold crushed velvet on the Bellini cab chairs complements the gray-blue silk draperies. OPPOSITE PAGE: *Rainfall Sunlight* by Stephen Chesley hangs above a headboard made from a hand-painted Venetian daybed. A combination of patterns and textures adds dimension to the neutral bedding.





Designer Muffie Faith envisioned a place suited for the eclectic, timeless items she loves to layer—from museum-quality antiques to family heirlooms and souvenirs.

BELOW LEFT: Vintage crewel window treatments, a silk teal rug, and Yves Delorme bedding transform this guest room and pamper the visitor. A pair of painted buffets topped with Italian-style carved wood lamps serve as bedside tables. The chairs include a Hepplewhite and a Paris flea market find covered in antique Bennison fabric. BELOW RIGHT: A mix of dark and light finishes gives the guest bath timeless appeal. A white bamboo étagère and a French chariot tub contrast with the original heart-pine floors, a Chippendale-style barrel chair, and a mahogany hand-painted tilt-top table. OPPOSITE PAGE: Faith calls this guest bedroom with a view of the harbor “very formal with an edge.” She began with floral wallpaper and curtain fabric by Osborne & Little, and then added a shag carpet and a 1940s white lacquered chest with a mirrored top and acrylic pulls.



teamed up with contractor Richard Marks, who specializes in restorations, to preserve the historical integrity of the house. Having grown up nearby, Marks was delighted to work on the project. “As kids playing in the marsh, we would kind of come up on the house, and it always seemed closed-off and unwelcoming,” he remembers.

The team took the estate from feeling haunted to looking haute with a renovation, a significant addition, and an eclectic approach to the interior that altogether took two years. “As we dug into the house, we realized how well it was built and what incredible shape it was in, so there wasn’t a lot of structural work to be done,” says Clowney. In fact, the house, with its four downstairs rooms, center hall, and three rooms upstairs, had withstood a number of hurricanes, as well as an earthquake in 1886. Nevertheless, the interior was gutted to the studs and then meticulously restored. The three upstairs rooms became two guest suites, with the dining room, living room, and study below.

Initially the house was to be a summer home, but Faith soon decided to make it the permanent residence for her family of five. Preserving the gardens was a priority, so an addition—which doubled the house’s size with a family room, a second living room, an office, a library, bedrooms, and baths—was planned around indigenous trees.

An old kitchen house was removed to make way for a new kitchen that serves as the link between the existing structure and the addition. To achieve a seamless look between the two, the volume and proportions of the house were



BREAD

BELOW: Designed around the live oak trees, the three-gabled 1850 residence—which houses guest suites, the dining room, and the living room—sits to the left. A central kitchen and garden connect to the new structure, which contains the family room, master bedroom, and children’s rooms. OPPOSITE PAGE: “I wanted it to look like there was an old hearth that I just happened to slide a stove into,” says Faith of the new kitchen, which serves as a transition from the original structure. Reclaimed Charleston brick on the hearth and antique wood doorknobs used as hardware evoke a sense of history. Honed Carrara marble surrounds a nickel apron sink.



carefully re-created. “We tried to delicately attach new structures in a sensitive way,” says Clowney. “The existing house had 11-foot ceilings downstairs, so the new proportions are the same.” Second-floor ceiling heights vary in accordance with the high-pitched Gothic Revival roofline.

No detail was overlooked, from the aged heart-pine floors to the true divided-light wood windows made to replicate those in the original house. Even the interior doors are made of raw cypress with a beeswax finish, in keeping with the character of the 1850s home.

When it came to the décor, Faith let the gardens be her guide. “I picked my first swatch of color, a very muted green, based on the marsh, the trees, and the water,” she says. She used different volumes of the same color throughout, creating a consistent background for the family’s art collection. The shades range from a crisp, pale green in a bathroom to a lush, deep-green velvet in the dining room, but the gardens remain a focal point of almost every space. “I wanted each window to be like a painting in itself,” she says.

Faith envisioned a place suited for the eclectic, timeless items she loves to layer—from museum-quality antiques to family heirlooms and souvenirs. The finished home is “a hard-to-find, bizarre mix of dramatic and inviting,” she says. “There’s a lot of Italian because I love Italy. It’s a definite mix of Deco, turn-of-the-century—everything.” The result of her leap of faith is an experience in Lowcountry comfort with a cosmopolitan flair. ♦

For details, see *Sourcebook*, page 134.