

Country Home

FALL BOUNTY

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NATURE-
INSPIRED
DECORATING
IDEAS



Recipes for a
Farm Table Feast

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Looking back while paddling out onto Black Cat Lake offers a spectacular view of architect Chris Sanders' renovated East Texas family compound and the towering cypress and pine trees that oversee it.

AMONG *the* PINES

A FOREST PRESERVE HAS LONG BEEN HOME TO AN OUT-OF-THE-WAY CABIN FOR ONE EAST TEXAS FAMILY. RECENTLY, A RESPECTFUL RENOVATION EXPANDED THE STRUCTURE TO MAKE ROOM FOR ANOTHER GENERATION.

WRITTEN BY SARAH HALVERSON PHOTOGRAPHED BY JULIE SOEFER STYLED BY JESSICA BRINKERT HOLTAM

THIS PHOTO If there was one common complaint about the old cabin, it was that the kitchen was a tight fit. Sanders and interior designer Killy Scheer stretched the room's footprint to accommodate everyday meals as well as the yearly Thanksgiving feast, when 40-plus people descend on the cabin from around the country. It's now plenty spacious for cooking and offers a surface for meal prep and a spot for hanging out with the chef or enjoying casual family meals. Scheer specified black-stained Shaker cabinetry, industrial-style lighting from The Urban Electric Co., and fresh white paint on the shiplap ceiling.



TO GET TO HIS IN-LAWS' HUNTING CABIN FROM Austin, Chris Sanders and his family drive about four hours. But the landscape changes so dramatically between here and there that it might as well be four days.

That's because East Texas, it might be said, is like a whole 'nother planet. "We live in big sky country in Central Texas—once you're out of Austin, you can see the horizon much of the time," Sanders says. "But in East Texas, things close in because the trees are so tall—two or three times as tall as the live oaks in Austin—and you don't see the horizon, the sunrise, or the sunset in the same way. The road is smaller, the light is different, and you're in the piney woods."

There, on 730 acres of forested splendor, resides a welcoming compound: this sprawling one-story cabin along with a brand-new two-story guesthouse stocked with bunks, a barn relocated from a floodplain, and a two-bedroom duplex. All of these structures cluster on the edge of 100-acre Black Cat Lake, home to largemouth bass and crappie just waiting for a fishing line. It's a little like stepping back in time.

Which is exactly what Sanders was going for. He's not just the son-in-law who gets to visit this little slice of forested

heaven on long weekends and at Thanksgiving. He's also the accomplished Austin architect who orchestrated the renovation of the original one-bedroom cabin that had been in the family for three generations. He brought in Killy Scheer of Scheer & Co. Interior Design, a longtime collaborator, so the pair could be sure they honored the modest cabin where so many memories reside while making room for a new generation of family members who long to make their own memories in this special place.

To that end, two large rooms were added to either end of the cabin: his mother-in-law's bedroom suite on the left and a large game room for gathering on the right. "The old kitchen was a pinch point," Sanders says, so he and Scheer expanded it and outfitted the space with black-stained reverse Shaker cabinets, an antique walnut farm table for an island/table, and a large apron-front sink. All told, the renovation more than doubled the cabin's size from 1,700 to 3,500 square feet.

To furnish and decorate the rooms, Scheer says, "we wanted to maintain the cozy cabin feel to keep it really comfortable for a family to actually use but add some refinement and tailoring." She was careful to include heirlooms that the family

ABOVE LEFT Sanders designed a long corridor that extends the length of the front of the house, connecting two additions and opening into the original cabin's kitchen and living room. Besides being a passageway, it serves as a family library with built-in shelves painted in Benjamin Moore's Narragansett Green for drama, coziness, and display. "When you're in the space, it feels as good as it photographs," Sanders says. **ABOVE RIGHT** The original living room didn't change much—it's still wrapped in cypress paneling, and the rocking chair and coffee table are longtime family favorites. But Scheer did design a new custom sofa for the space, partly because this is one of only two rooms with a TV. "The house is designed for human interaction rather than television entertainment," she says.



THIS PHOTO An extensive record collection had been in storage since the 1980s, and Sanders made a home for it (and a record player) in the corridor. Curling up on a window seat with a book, listening to an outlaw country record, and taking in the lake view is a favorite afternoon activity.

cherished: wooden nightstands in the cypress-lined guest bedroom, a bench in the primary bedroom, and a salmon-color table and chairs in the breakfast room. The designer mixed in new pieces that play nicely with the vintage ones for a layered, collected look. The result is a fully updated cabin that somehow feels like it's always been there.

"There was some restorative aspect to the changes we made to this building," Sanders says. "We turned the page on its use and expanded it so it better suits the larger generation of family, and at the same time we looked back at the history and how it has served the family over the years." Now, the rejuvenated cabin doesn't just represent the past but also thoroughly relishes the present. □

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RIGHT The cheery salmon-color dining set is a family heirloom, so Scheer gave it a place of honor just off the entry. Part of the original cabin, the space is lined from floor to ceiling with old-growth wormwood cypress harvested on the property decades ago. The oak flooring, though, is new throughout. It's stained a warm brown for contrast. **BELOW** The game room addition sits ready for cards, checkers, and board games. Sanders designed the tucked-in bar around a painting by Donna Howell-Sickles from the family's collection. **BELOW RIGHT** The corridor is a stunning backdrop for the homeowners' collections of books and vintage vinyl, which are arranged on built-in shelves spanning its length and height. Scheer brought in vintage rugs to soften the floors and inspire color schemes.





"THE BEAUTY OF THE PROPERTY REALLY NEVER STOPPED SURPRISING ME. THE SCENERY IS SO STARKLY DIFFERENT FROM THAT IN AUSTIN. I'D TAKE TONS OF PHOTOS EVERY TIME I DROVE IN TO CAPTURE THE MISTY MORNINGS ON THE LAKE. IT IMMEDIATELY MADE ME SLOW DOWN AND BREATHE."

—INTERIOR DESIGNER KILLY SCHEER




ILLUSTRATION: OLLUSTRATOR/GETTY IMAGES



TOP This open-air porch nestles on the second floor of the new guesthouse. Because its exterior walls are screens, not windows, it's a prime sleeping space during autumn's cooler nights—hence the folding cots, outdoor ceiling fan, and lightweight chairs that easily scoot out of the way. **ABOVE LEFT** Killy Scheer, of Scheer & Co. Interior Design, balanced a cozy cabin feeling with modern amenities and furnishings that offer comfort and style. **ABOVE RIGHT** A large firepit perches on the edge of the lake—just the spot to sit with a hot drink and warm up by the fire. The family keeps a cache of canoes nearby for fishing or just knocking around on the water. **OPPOSITE** An expansive porch is the first thing visitors glimpse when they pull up to the house. "That's the arrival moment," Sanders says. "Often people don't make it beyond that porch into the house." It's equipped with this dining spot—and bug screens that unroll from above. "From March to October, the mosquitos can carry you away," Sanders says. "The outdoor space becomes a lot more comfortable when you can drop those screens down."




"RATHER THAN TRYING TO PUSH AGAINST AND CHANGE THE CHARACTER OF WHAT'S ALREADY THERE, WE APPROACH ALL OF OUR PROJECTS, ESPECIALLY A RENOVATION, TRYING TO HARMONIZE WITH IT. 'DANCE WITH THE ONE THAT BRUNG YA,' IN OTHER WORDS."

—ARCHITECT CHRIS SANDERS

OPPOSITE The primary bedroom, with its soaring beamed ceilings and fresh-as-air color scheme of blues and teals, was one of the major additions to the house. Scheer reupholstered the headboard of a new bed from Restoration Hardware to pick up the colors in the vintage rug, which has been in the family for years—one of several items the homeowners wanted to incorporate into the renovated cabin. The Hitchcock-style bench at the end of the bed is another longtime treasure, having belonged to the family, while the nightstands are recent purchases. "We mixed new pieces with family heirlooms and kept the palette light and bright," Scheer says. **ABOVE RIGHT** The bathroom got a much-needed upgrade during the renovation; this full bath is part of the new primary bedroom suite. Scheer introduced stained cabinetry that allows the wood grain to shine through. Matchstick shades offer texture and practicality. "We chose materials that don't collect dust as easily, and shades are easier to dust or vacuum," Scheer says. **RIGHT** Lined from floor to ceiling with old-growth wormwood cypress, the original guest bedroom evokes a classic hunting cabin. Sanders and Scheer were determined to preserve as much as they could, incorporating nightstands the family already owned and a framed swatch of wallpaper uncovered during the project. Scheer even had a faux-finish artist deftly disguise the switchplates and return air vents so as to not distract from the wood walls and ceilings.

