



A Designer's MUSE

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY DANA FINIMORE

Creative pursuits come easy when you are surrounded by beautiful things.

Sheryl Putnam's home is her muse. Sunlight sweeps in through ample windows, inviting creative pursuit.

As the only example of historic Italianate design in Grenada, you could expect the Putnam home to be exquisite. Set on a one-acre lot of old camellia and pecan trees, it was built with two staircases, seven fireplaces and two porches. There is much room to wander within the four bedrooms, two bathrooms, living room, dining room, sunroom and study.

The home was built in 1880 and sold 10 years later to the Dubard family; they owned it until the 1980s, when a family friend purchased it. In 1997, Sheryl and Norbert Putnam became the fourth owners of the home and, while it was not the first old home they have restored, it has become their favorite.

"Restoration along with what you put into a home generates good feelings," Sheryl Putnam offers. "Infusing our art, music, thoughts and feelings with





this home keeps us surrounded by beauty and, in turn, helps us create beautiful things.”

Through their 15-year marriage, the Putnams have lived in older homes from Hilton Head, South Carolina, to towns neighboring Nashville, Tennessee.

Restoring the homes to their original grandeur seems their way of life. So what makes the Grenada house so special?

“Everything in our home is creative,” Putnam

explains. “The old wavy glass in the windows brings in light and makes the outside world look more beautiful and surreal.” Rooms filled with the Putnams’ eclectic handiwork is a trigger for their creative processes. Hence, the house is her muse.

It didn’t excite Putnam at first. Dark with carpet and heavy drapes, she immediately began restoring the home to its original wood floors and lighter paint. During that time she says she experienced



(Left) An antique sleigh bed beckons comfort with its crisp linens and fluffy down-filled duvet. Colorful rugs, cozy fireplaces and vintage accessories are staples in the home's many bedrooms.

(Below) Sheryl Putnam wanted a home filled with light and color. This meant discarding the home's heavy drapes and dark carpets in exchange for original hardwood floors, creamy walls and sheer window treatments.





communion with the home.

"Now the home is like a refuge, very safe and secure," Putnam proclaims. "As soon as I walk through the door, I feel embraced, complete and driven to create."

Putnam returned to her native Grenada in 1996 to help her mother after her father died. She started making lavender-filled pillows with her mother, to help distract from the grief they both felt.

Within one month, they had made 110 pillows, which were not only relaxing in texture and aroma, but repelled moths.

"It was a challenge combining modern silk with lavender, which is a style from long ago," Putnam explains.

That effort eventually led to initiating her line of fashion accessories, Sheryl Putnam Designs. Her business has expanded from the pillows to include fabric and knitted wraps and purses and seems to be heading in yet another direction.

"When it started three years ago, it wasn't going to be a business," Putnam recalls. "We eventually got into one store in Memphis, then two and so on."

Today, Putnam's line is in several Southeastern stores: Joseph in Memphis and Houston, Texas; Maison Weiss in Oxford and Jackson, Miss.; Zelda's in Nashville; and The Wishing Well in Cleveland, Miss.

Putnam's newest designs include knitted alpaca and other yarns with hand-dyed silk ribbon woven into many of the pieces. Putnam's daughter, Amber Gilluly of Jackson, Miss., has created an additional line for babies.

Putnam's designs compete with products made in Europe and New York City: "To have all these pieces handmade in Grenada, Mississippi, and never have any rejected is something I am very proud of."

Putnam plans to keep her production based in Mississippi. She's growing slowly, designing everything herself and employing



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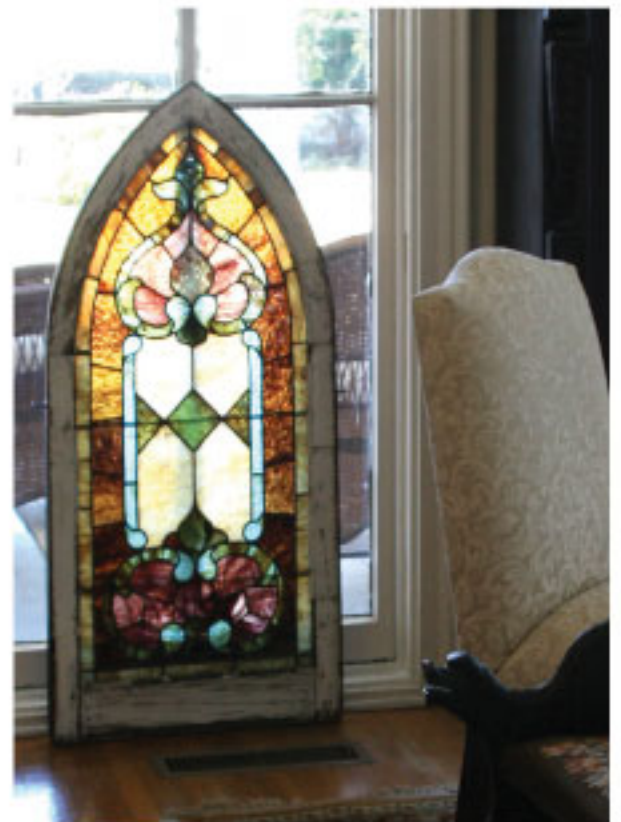
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a handful of local knitters and seamstresses.

She originally intended to only create accessories but the design of a skirt for her personal wardrobe earlier this year may prompt her to change course: "I wore my skirt to a trunk show and got six orders for ones like it during that showing."

Putnam credits her success to husband Norbert, claiming that he gave her the courage to believe in her creativity and pursue a business of her own.

Multi-platinum music producer Norbert Putnam enjoyed much creativity and countless career credits before he met Sheryl, who was working at Word Records in Nashville. Norbert has enjoyed a long, successful music career, beginning with the original Muscle Shoals Rhythm Section.

He played bass guitar on five Elvis Presley albums and opened for The Beatles in their first United States live performance in Washington, D.C. He has also produced albums for major recording artists, laying down tracks for hits like Jimmy Buffett's "Margaritaville" and Joan Baez's "The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down."

The album featuring that song – "Blessed Are" – was Baez's first album to sell more than a million copies, catapulting Putnam from bassist to full-time music producer.

He produced that album and others at Quadrophonic Recording, a studio he helped build in an old Nashville house. The idea of building a studio in a house was considered crazy but the business succeeded, even gaining notoriety as the birthplace of the enclosed drum room commonly found in studios today.

Putnam eventually produced several Grammy Award-winning gospel albums before retiring. He currently mentors young people and is helping develop a recording-arts program with Delta State University.

Sheryl Putnam is grateful for Norbert's encouragement and happy with her own creative outlet: "Norbert always talked about a 'zone' he went into when doing his work.

"I never experienced that creative escape until we moved into this house. When I found that place, it was the most incredible, encompassing world to me, and the greatest gift."

Back in 1996, the Putnams were very content with life in their 1910 cottage-style house in Columbia, Tennessee. Their decision to move to Grenada felt like a sacrifice but they've realized abundant rewards.

"I am so glad we did not let fear overtake us back then," Sheryl Putnam recalls. "Doors open for a reason and, if you have enough faith to go through them, great things can happen." ♦