

House Beautiful

A COLLECTOR'S ISSUE

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LOW-COUNTRY HIGH STYLE

In Charleston, above a humble 1816 ground-floor cabinetmaker's shop where Robert Hicklin now sells paintings, there remained architecturally refined residential spaces—a not uncommon urban configuration. The art dealer decorated them with period pieces and now lives over the store in style

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Robert Hicklin hangs favorite paintings in his drawing room: a Thomas Wightman still life over the fireplace (opposite) and a John Adams Elder genre painting above the New York-made breakfast table, circa 1815 (above left). The mantelpiece, taken from a Charleston house razed in the early 1900s, was found in that city at Estate Antiques on King Street. The classically carved Massachusetts sofa, similar to one at the Essex Institute in Salem made by Samuel McIntire, is covered in a Scalamandré taffeta moreen. Mahogany faux-graining for doors and faux marble on baseboards was found under layers of paint and restored. Left: Marble-top center table, c. 1820, and armchairs, c. 1835, were both made in New York.

Rooms with fine woodwork, twelve-foot ceilings, and tall windows are not what come to mind when we hear about “living over the store.” But art dealer Robert M. Hicklin, Jr., points out that beautiful upstairs rooms were important to the original tenant of the 1816 building he bought in Charleston more than three years ago: The cabinetmaker worked on the ground floor but showed off his wares on the upper floors.

Ground-level workshops “were always dog-plain,” says Hicklin, and his had been changed so many times that he felt no qualms about remodeling to create a gallery for his paintings, all southern, from 1840 to 1950. On the other hand, he wanted to faithfully restore the rooms above because they retained so much rich architectural detail—unusual in a house this age. To help find an expert in restoration and decoration, Hicklin and his wife, Jane, turned for advice to Tom Savage, then director of museums for the Historic Charleston Foundation, who introduced them to Thomas Jayne, a New York designer.

Jayne, a history buff, chose Gallier Diamond, a documentary wallpaper from a historic New Orleans house, for a small office, then took the color scheme from the paper.

The furniture—fine period pieces made in northern cities—is equally appropriate. Although Charleston was one of the country’s important cabinet-making centers in Colonial and Federal days, “the city also had a history of importing goods from up north,” says Jayne. He and his clients would have loved to include more local pieces, but they have become extremely rare in today’s market because they are being scooped up by museums and by southern collectors proud of their heritage.

“Wallpaper is wonderful for showing off paintings,” says Thomas Jayne about the Brunschwig & Fils reproduction (top right). Valance silk from Claremont. Armchair and linen press are contemporaneous with the house. Near right: The 1816 house where Rob Hicklin (far right, on the second-floor balcony) lives. Opposite: South Carolina bed.

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