



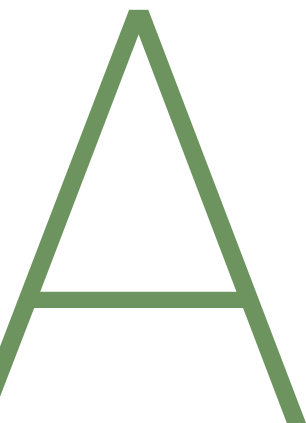
A SENSE OF PLACE

Designer Ashley Gilbreath transforms a beloved High Hampton cottage into an effortlessly collected retreat. Text by **Blake Miller** • Photography by **Emily Followill**

"We wanted this space to feel dark, moody, and a little unexpected—leaning into the wood walls, antique-inspired details, and warm candlelight," says designer Ashley Gilbreath. **Artwork:** Craig Greene. **Mirror:** Parish by Ashley Gilbreath.

OPPOSITE: Gilbreath enveloped the owner's bedroom in a dark, wiped-on paint finish that lends depth and softness. **Headboard:** Custom, Mark V Jordan. **Bedding:** Leontine Linens. **Sconce:** Visual Comfort. **Table lamp:** Parish by Ashley Gilbreath.





SHLEY AND BARRETT GILBREATH NEVER imagined themselves owning a mountain retreat. Alabama-based and devoted beachgoers, the couple had long managed their family vacations by the rhythm of the coast. “For as long as I can remember, our family has vacationed at the beach,” says Ashley, an interior designer. “I’m

from Louisiana, Barrett is from Alabama, so the beach was simply the easier destination. During Covid, we even moved into our beach house full-time.”

A weekend with friends in Cashiers changed everything. They were instantly charmed by the area. Not long after, close friend and designer James Farmer mentioned to the Gilbreaths that there was a home for sale in High Hampton. “He thought we’d love it,” says Gilbreath. “Within a few hours of seeing it, Barrett had it under contract. It happened that quickly.” The home, a quiet cottage tucked into the woods on High Hampton’s property, was slightly worn, but “emotionally, you could tell that it had been a wonderful loved-on property for a very long time.”

Surrounded by misty tree lines, blue skies, and a slower pace of life, the Gilbreaths found themselves unexpectedly captivated. What began as a short escape quickly became the spark for an entirely new chapter.

The home, though dated, boasted strong architectural bones, and with the help of architect David Baker of TSB Architecture, Gilbreath knew she could transform it. The most significant transformation would occur on the lower level, where previously underutilized structural space was enclosed to create a bunk room and cozy den that opens onto a porch lined with swings.

Upstairs, the team enclosed a portion of the expansive wraparound porch—much of which had gone unused—to expand the kitchen and rework the roofline. The original kitchen was then repurposed as a functional rear entry, laundry room, and powder bath, making better use of the existing layout.

Gilbreath then focused on the interior design, which remained fully furnished by the previous owner. “A precious older woman owned the home, and she left behind tons of collections that made it so unique,” she says. “There was a sense of a life that happened before. The accessories had been collected for years and years, and that’s something you can’t go to the store and purchase.” Much of the rest of the interiors were sourced by Gilbreath at antique markets.

“The best vacation homes feel completely different from your everyday life,” she says. “You should walk through the door and immediately know you’re somewhere else. What I loved most about this house was its incredible sense of place—you knew you were in the mountains. There’s something deeply nostalgic about mountain living. The pace is slower, the air is quieter, and somehow it always feels like there should be a fire crackling, even in the middle of



ABOVE: Interior designer Ashley Gilbreath is celebrated for creating timeless, deeply personal interiors that balance Southern warmth with understated sophistication. Known for honoring a home’s history while embracing modern living, she layers antiques, natural textures, and collected pieces to craft spaces that feel authentic, inviting, and effortlessly lived in.

summer. It reminds me of my grandparents’ home, where every room held stories. The old books, candlesticks, beautifully worn boxes—they all create a feeling that life has unfolded there long before you arrived. That’s what made this house so special.”

Rather than start from scratch, Gilbreath embraced many of the home’s inherited treasures, preserving wicker baskets, an antique grandfather clock, and vintage Hull pottery—pieces, she says, “you simply can’t find anymore.” Layered thoughtfully throughout the interiors, heirloom objects lend the home an effortless sense of warmth and authenticity, reinforcing the feeling that it has evolved gracefully over generations rather than been decorated all at once.

Today, the cottage feels less like a second home and more like a return to something quietly familiar. While the Gilbreaths never expected to trade the shoreline for the Blue Ridge Mountains, they discovered that the most memorable retreats aren’t defined by geography, but by the way they make you feel. In preserving the home’s layered history while gently shaping it for their own family, they’ve created a timeless escape that feels as though it has always belonged to them. ●

The antique wicker baskets were an inherited collection from the previous homeowner. "These baskets are one of a kind and felt perfect for this home," explains Gilbreath of keeping the treasured pieces as a decorative element in the mudroom. **Curtain fabric:** James Malone Volga. **Faucets:** Waterstone.



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—ASHLEY GILBREATH



The antique grandfather clock in the dining nook is just one of the pieces Gilbreath inherited from the previous homeowner. "There were so many collections she left behind that give this home a sense of place," says the designer. "You can't recreate that with all new pieces." **Table and dining chairs:** Parish by Ashley Gilbreath. **Floor lamps:** Visual Comfort. **Sofa:** Custom, Mark V Jordan.





An antique console and mirror from Parish by Ashley Gilbreath transform an overlooked niche into a vestibule connecting the wet bar to the living room.

Drapery fabric: Lee Jofa Highland Wool with piping in Kravet Ticking.



LEFT: Gilbreath anchored the deck off the kitchen with an antique worktable, while original wall-mounted containers, preserved from the home's earliest days, lend an added layer of history and character.

Dining chairs and table: Summer Classics. **Stool and bar:** Parish by Ashley Gilbreath.

BELOW LEFT: Rather than reinventing the home's galley kitchen, Gilbreath collaborated with architect David Baker to thoughtfully relocate it to what was originally a porch. **Lighting:** Lowcountry Originals.

Range: Ilve. **Rug:** Turkish Carpets, Inc.

BELOW RIGHT: Just off the living room, a screened porch extends the home's living space into the landscape. "The idea is to create a covered outdoor room you can enjoy in every season, no matter the weather," says Gilbreath.

Dining table, chairs, sofa, and lounge chairs: Summer Classics. **Coffee table:** Parish by Ashley Gilbreath. **Lighting:** Visual Comfort.







A dramatic chandelier anchors the oversized great room, visually connecting the dining and living areas while emphasizing the home's soaring scale. To temper its expansiveness, Gilbreath arranged a series of intimate seating vignettes, each with a distinct purpose, creating a layered atmosphere that feels both welcoming and effortlessly livable. **Console table, black floor lamp, leather armchair, and ottoman:** Parish by Ashley Gilbreath. **Chandelier:** Lowcountry Originals. **Rug:** From Jaipur with Love.





Inspired by the mountain setting, the guest bedroom boasts layered blues and greens to echo the surrounding scenery. The natural palette creates a seamless transition from the rest of the home while still giving the space its own personality. **Rug:** Eve and Staron Studio. **Floor and table lamps:** Visual Comfort. **Wall paint:** Benjamin Moore Cascade Green.

OPPOSITE, TOP: Bunk beds were a must in the mountain home, but they also needed to flow with the rest of the home's decor, so Gilbreath gave them a playful, sophisticated look through softly curved millwork and layered shades of green. **Bunk-bed paint:** Benjamin Moore Kittery Point Green. **Wall paint:** Sherwin-Williams Jade Dragon. **Carpet:** Fibreworks.

OPPOSITE, BOTTOM: The owner's bathroom echoes its rustic mountain setting with its wood paneling and custom vanity by Grace Fabrications. A vintage nineteenth-century pastel nude sketch and charcoal artwork give the space a collected feel. **Rug:** Parish by Ashley Gilbreath. **Vanity:** Custom by Grace Fabrications. **Hardware and faucets:** Waterworks. **Mirrors:** Gowan Iron Works.