

Habitat

by Tara Behan
photographs by Jason Sandy



MILITARY MIGHT

The neglected Newtown Square home of a decorated hero gets a major makeover.

For more than a decade, Melissa Clark had been driving by a neglected but intriguing property on one of her regular routes through Newtown Square. The overgrown bamboo that shielded views was cleared only when the house was put on the market. It revealed the former residence of Maj. Gen. Smedley Darlington Butler, one of the most decorated U.S. Marines in history.

Clark had no intention of buying the house, as she had recently completely a renovation of an older home in Berwyn. But she did go to an open house for the property to satiate her curiosity about the interior. In the end, she purchased it and undertook a year-long renovation project.

SALVAGING A TREASURE

Originally constructed in the late 1800s, the Art Deco-style home had to be rebuilt after a fire in 1919. Butler purchased the property in 1931 and lived there until his death in 1940. The residence remained in his family until three years ago.

During Clark's open-house visit, she was immediately taken with the grand center hall, with its split staircase leading to a wraparound balcony. "I was told the Butlers had originally bought the house because it looked very much like the great hall at the Citadel," says Clark.

But a grand center hall couldn't hide the fact that the house needed a complete overhaul. "As I walked through, I thought, 'It's going to take someone who's really foolish

and has a lot of money,'" Clark recalls.

She walked away with the nagging feeling that it would probably be torn down. But after six months on the market, she revisited the home, convinced that it could be the perfect place to share with her husband and four children. "We weren't intending to move," she says. "But there was something about this house that really spoke to me. I can't say exactly what it was. I just wanted to save it."

Clark brought in Villanova builder Mark Janiczek and Downingtown architect Brett Hand, with the goal of saving and repurposing as much of the original structure as possible. "Every doorknob in the house—even on the new doors—is an original," says Clark.

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Resources

ARCHITECT: Brett Hand Architecture, Downingtown, (484) 354-2997, www.hand-architect.com.
BUILDER: Janiczek Homes, Wayne, (484) 580-8104, www.janiczekhomes.com.



(Clockwise from opposite page) The home's unusual exterior has been described as "Northern, modern plantation"; the master bathroom; a sunlit sitting area; the renovated and expanded kitchen.



Featured Home *continued from page 36*

At the front of the house, an interior entryway of glass transoms and sidelights leads into the center hall. All of it used to be part of the original front door.

While many residential renovations include increasing the overall square footage, Clark wanted a decrease. The Butlers had added two-story sun porches on both sides of the main structure. "The extra square footage wasn't necessary for the Clarks," says Janiczek.

On one side, a more practical open porch has replaced the two-story version. On the other, there's now a one-story master bedroom suite with a bathroom, his-and-hers walk-in closets, a laundry room and an office. "A first-floor master was something we really wanted," says Clark.

Adds Janiczek: "It was clearly the biggest transformation of the existing space."

A one-bedroom apartment over the garage was also restored, as well as the original in-ground pool.

MODERN PLANTATION LIVING

According to Hand, a significant architectural challenge was giving the home an identity. Post-renovation, he still struggles with labeling the house, but he's settled on "Northern, modern plantation house."

"I've worked on many old homes, but there isn't a category for this one," he says. "It doesn't fit into any particular box. There are many great traditional details, but the outside is a new animal."

The grand two-story center hall with fireplace that had initially charmed Clark became the living room—the main space where friends and family congregate. "We

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—Architect Brett Hand

wanted to make sure it was used for more than just a hallway," says Hand. "It feels like an older art gallery, with the upper level promenade where people can look down on the party. That's the really cool part of the space."

After living in houses with small kitchens, Clark was thrilled to have a generous room

that could accommodate the large workspace she envisioned. Though traditional in style, Clark added touches of whimsy—like a pair of antique glass chandeliers and a bright green cabinet with a thick butcher-block top at one end of the island, which also has a large sink with double faucets. Clark chose light gray for the wall cabinets, providing a subtle contrast.

Since the house had been hidden from view for years, Clark chose something that would stand out when it came time to pick a color for the stucco exterior. "I moved from a stone house, so I was a little bit flummoxed by having to choose a color," she says.

Clark opted for a bold, goldenrod-yellow hue. "It got a lot of raised eyebrows from a lot of different people," she admits. "But once I chose the color, I never looked back."

Now that the renovations are complete, Clark couldn't be more thrilled that she went to that open house. "We love living here," she says. "I had a vision from my first visit, and that's exactly what it turned into."

Her team of experts was thrilled to be a part of the process, as well. "Though we do a fair amount of new construction, I really enjoy the challenge of a historic house," says Janiczek. "I especially enjoy it when there's a client that's extremely active in the process and has a wonderful vision—like Melissa." **MLT**



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