

Georgia

PEACH OF A PARTY BARN

With a little TLC, a dilapidated farm building proves the perfect retreat for a family of four and their frequent football-loving houseguests—all of whom love a good underdog comeback story.

written by LAURA KOSTELNY photographs by EMILY FOLLOWILL
styling by RAINA KATTELSON



THE PORCH

While almost every piece of the red chipped tin is original to the roughly 100-year-old structure, the roof is brand-new. An outdoor sitting area features a porch swing (scottantiquemarket.com), Amish rocking chairs, and a bright red trough-turned-coffee table.



KITCHEN

Made from wood found in the original barn, the bar serves as a rustic focal point. The cedar posts, which support the half-loft above, were cut at a local sawmill. Sarah and Russell wanted the posts to remain as natural as possible, complete with original bark and moss. The bar stools ([parkhillcollection.com](#)) provide a perfect perch beneath the egg-basket light fixture ([creativecoop.com](#)). Because storage space is limited, an old pie safe is home to a coffee pot, dishware, and a toaster oven.

ENTRY

Sliding barn doors covered with tin original to the barn ease the flow of traffic indoors and out. As nearby Athens is a musicians' hamlet, instruments are always laying about, ready for use by either visiting friends or the Bennetts. Son Charles, for example, plays the violin and the guitar; daughter Jain (left) has taken a liking to the ukulele; and Russell plays songs by Waylon Jennings and the Allman Brothers Band on an assortment of instruments.

When you live a mere 25 miles from the University of Georgia, you better be ready to accommodate Bulldogs fans come game day. At least, that was Sarah and Russell Bennett's thinking when they decided to convert an old hay barn on their 120-acre farm into a place where friends and family could make a little hay. Tucked away in Monroe, Georgia (population 10,600), the farm has been in Russell's family for some 30 years. So after graduating from the beloved nearby university, the couple commenced their next stage of higher learning: renovation. While the Bennetts had a wish list of modern amenities, they hoped to maintain the approximately 100-year-old structure's charm. They turned to Sarah's childhood friend Tyler Davis of Athens Building Company ([athensbuilding.com](#)) for help achieving both goals. "We wanted it to still look like the same barn from the road, only better. Tyler was willing to take the risk, and we were willing to say, 'If the whole thing crumbles, we understand,'" she says.

To everyone's great relief, it didn't crumble—though it *was* completely dismantled. After numbering each and every piece of exterior tin, Tyler and his team took it all apart. Using the 650-square-foot footprint, they reframed the building, making it more structurally sound, and then reassembled the pieces like a giant puzzle. "Using the same footprint was



HOW SMART IS THIS?

An old power-cable holder is now an entry table. "We wrapped the base with burlap," says Sarah. "It's the perfect height for appetizers and drinks."

LIVING ROOM

The sitting area is home to wingback chairs from an antiquing trip to Cashiers, North Carolina; eight gooseneck barn lights ([monroecottonmills.com](#)); and a pair of custom antique-wagon-wheel chandeliers ([jbtworks.com](#)). An old industrial cart does double duty as a coffee table and record storage. Sarah found the "Hotel Bennett" sign on a shopping trip to White's Mercantile ([whitesmercantile.com](#)) in Nashville. "I asked if it was for sale, so they called the owner [CL Contributor Holly Williams] and got a price," Sarah says.





SLEEPING LOFT

The upstairs bedroom features reclaimed pine walls cut at a local sawmill. The two bed frames—a king and a queen—are built directly into the wall and dressed in Pine Cone Hill linens and pillows (*annieselke.com*) and coverlets from Ikea (*ikea.com*). The side table is a pine chest the couple won at a local auction, and it provides storage for extra pillows and blankets. Sarah found the barn light at Monroe Cotton Mills (*monroecottonmills.com*).

THE "OFFICE"

Russell, a real estate investment firm owner by day, tackles business tasks at a custom desk, which was a handmade wedding gift from a friend. The display case is filled with turkey calls. "He's passionate about wild turkey conservation, and he's been on the lookout for the old handmade calls for a long time," Sarah says. Son Charles heads safely down the stairs thanks to a reclaimed fence-post railing.

helpful," says Sarah, noting she likes having limited options. "If you tell me this is where the plumbing has to go, then I'm able to say, 'I guess this is where the kitchen goes!'"

She was able to get more creative when it came to repurposing found materials from around the farm. For example, the couple used the wood from the barn's original hayloft for the half-loft, flooring, and stairs, and an old on-site fence post for the stair railing. Sarah also enlisted her mother-in-law, an antiques dealer, to help layer in vintage finds, many of which were sourced in Monroe, which has become a bit of an antiques destination. "Two floors of an old cotton mill have been converted into shops," says Sarah. "It's a great spot to spend the entire day antiquing." They also frequently stumble across old horseshoes on the property, so they employed them as handles on all of the barn doors. "That was a whole process. Luckily, we had a lot to practice with."

These days, when friends are en route to and from Athens, they know to make a pit stop at the hay barn, and some savor their "bale-gating" experience so much that they stay over. And while, in these parts, college football is serious business, the Bennetts also embrace another form of competition that requires a good eye, steady hands, and quick feet. "We like to take people on walks in the woods to see what interesting things we find—arrowheads, artifacts," says Sarah. Whoever gets the best stuff wins—even if their beloved Georgia Bulldogs don't.



HOW SMART IS THIS?
The couple transformed the traditionally overlooked space beneath the stairwell into a home office.

PORCH

While Russell mans the grill—hamburgers and hot dogs on game day—Sarah assembles bamboo folding chairs around a custom table for alfresco dining and the promise of a spectacular Georgia sunset. An old, rusty farming implement hangs from the post. "Russell is a bit of a picker. He found that in the woods and just decided to hang it there," says Sarah.

