



# The Green, Green Grass of Home

*Liberty Hill Farm provides a horse-loving family with a splendid historic home*

BY STEPHANIE STEWART • PHOTOS BY RON MANVILLE



**Y**ou have to admit, driving through Brentwood, you're far less likely to be thinking "historic site" than if you're traveling through Franklin or other Williamson County neighborhoods. The truth is, however, that Brentwood is absolutely full of beautiful historic homes. They've just merged so well with some of the local suburbs that if you aren't looking, you might miss them for the golf course or the new tract of homes. It doesn't mean they're not there, though, or that they haven't been preserved. However, especially with the recent death of Brentwood historian Vance Little, residents aren't always aware of what's sitting right next door. Fortunately Mark and Leslie Finkelstein recognized the value of their exceptional home, Liberty Hill Farm, the moment they walked in.

"This was my dream house," says Leslie Finkelstein. "My old house, in Hollywood Beach, Florida, was very Mediterranean—not cosy or historic. It was in that kind of very South Florida, upscale gated community. I wanted historic—and I knew I had to have an equestrian property. When I lived in Florida, I had to drive an hour to ride. I knew I needed a place here where I could have my horses in the backyard."

The moment the couple saw Liberty Hill Farm, they knew it was perfect. The house is built in layers, the oldest part being a one-and-a-half story cabin constructed about 1796 on what was then a Revolutionary War land grant to Private Thomas Buckle, eventually sold to Henry Coffey, then John Hamer within a few years. That cabin survives today as informal dining room, while its loft, then a covered fort space with gun ports for the Indian Wars,



is now a cozy playroom. The original stairs to the loft are still in use, and the original wood floors and fireplace downstairs have been restored.

The formal dining room represents Hamer's 1812 addition to the cabin, again with original floors and architectural features visible. The front of the house, in shape and layout similar to that of the Sam Davis Home in Smyrna, was added on decades later, perhaps in 1853. (The house was owned by Hamer's only heir, his unmarried daughter Jane, until her death in 1879). The spaces making up that part of the house are now a guest room and music room-cum-parlor on the lower level of the house, and upstairs create the children's bedrooms.

The children's bedrooms, still with the original wooden floors (slightly sloping, in the case of son Blake's room) have been carefully customized—a horse-centric room for daughter Katie, complete with a barn door on the closet, and a room devoted to basketball for sports-mad Blake. A tiny door through Blake's room, with a two-foot drop on the other side, provides a magical entrance to the playroom-loft of the former cabin.

Downstairs, what was once an L-shaped exterior porch like those at the Sam Davis Home and Travellers Rest has been enclosed with glass (in a 1992 remodel), and a large den and the master suite were built directly off the hallway it created.

On the opposite side of the cabin downstairs is a spacious contemporary kitchen, one of the parts of the house the Finkelsteins chose to modernize significantly when they purchased the property in 2006. "We made fairly modest renovations," says Leslie Finkelstein. "Most of the big changes were made in the 1992 remodeling by the previous owners. We really just updated things, made them more contemporary." She admits that they've contemplated moving the master suite at the back of the house entirely, as it blocks the spectacular pasture view

from other parts of the house, and they've had an architect draw up plans, but currently have opted to wait awhile.

The house is furnished largely in antiques, some of which were bought locally, but many more of which moved with the family from Florida. Their tastes are ornate, classic and high Victorian, which blend well with the house itself. Modernity only truly inserts itself in the modern additions, like the family room and kitchen, and in the children's rooms.

Perhaps one of the greatest draws for the horse-loving family was the exceptional barn. "We really didn't make a lot of changes," says Leslie. "We made the doors and things smaller, since the previous owner had draft horses, and I have ponies and small horses." The barn itself is clean and inviting, with doors left open so that the animals can let themselves out into the pasture. A comfy office provides a place to hang the saddles, and also a private respite from the world. Above the office is a bedroom, a perfect spot for guests to enjoy, that, like much of the house, is furnished with abundant antiques, vintage pieces and fine reproductions.

Leslie Finkelstein's passion for horses means that most of hers are rescues, taken from pony mills or abandoned by previous owners. Her devotion has produced loving creatures that can easily move between their stalls and other spaces. It's hard to imagine a more placid or pleasant setting for the family than here, joined as they are by their two large dogs, Lab pup Frankie and mixed breed Sammie.

When the family moved in, they lived for a month in the guest cottage located neatly between home and barn, along a brick pathway, during the time the renovations on the house were being finished. (The kitchen, last remodeled in the early '90s, was completely contemporized, for example, and a back sunroom with a grill was added to the space.) With a natural and organic flavor to the construction, it's welcoming, and perfect for a guest or a couple—although it's amazing to imagine a family of four staying here.

Set on broad acreage that connects it to a growing Brentwood development, the home maintains its rural flavor, but the neighbors are still visible. Large nearby homes are built on what was part of the original land grant, and the next-door neighbor's yard also houses the old Hamer family cemetery. Liberty Hill Farm is the best of both worlds, with beautiful views, stables, pastures for riding and a quiet location, but still only five minutes from downtown Brentwood and 10 from the bustle of Cool Springs. The Farm underlines the fact that it's possible to restore and maintain a historic site, and green space, within a suburban landscape, and still preserve the best trappings of a rural life.