



The original front door relocated to this back entry, where a built-in bench and shelving create a handy drop zone. Homeowner Sara McDaniel repurposed the cottage's original faucet handles as coat hooks. She salvaged the wire baskets from her old high school.

A LABOR *of love*

This once-forlorn Louisiana cottage is now a delightful historical haven—and a testament to one woman’s vision and persistence.

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Blogger Sara McDaniel is a woman of many talents. Among them is the ability to see potential, coaxing the best out of people and places. As a former teacher and assistant principal, she travels the country helping educators and schools excel. So when she decided to move back to her hometown of Minden, Louisiana, after a stint in Dallas, she instinctively gravitated to a seemingly hopeless 1920s cottage, abandoned for nearly a decade. “I was unequivocally smitten,” Sara says.

Barely visible behind an overgrown tangle of trees, bushes, and vines, the worn and weathered

porch gave way to a warren of tiny rooms piled floor-to-ceiling with years of dust-layered belongings, yellowing papers, and long-expired canned goods. But even the caved ceilings, rotting wood, and critters in the attic didn’t deter Sara—she envisioned only the beauty the 1926 cottage once was and could become again. She wasn’t wrong, but it did take nearly two years of patient pursuit to buy the home and another year of planning and remodeling to complete its impressive transformation.

“It was very important to me to reclaim and repurpose as much of the original house as I could



Opposite: Sara restored the original 1920s light fixture in the dining room. Natural fiber shades at the windows bring warmth to the generous expanses of white. *Below:* Sara snuggles with her parents' dog, Rocky, on the front porch swing. *Right:* Removing walls opened the kitchen to the dining room, making the home feel larger. Sara refurbished the cottage's original wood floors, which were oak at the front of the house and pine in private spaces. "In that era, homeowners wanted guests to see the more expensive oak," she says. The island base is made from wood reclaimed from another old house in Minden. The top is century-old barnwood. The wood box on the wall, which Sara now uses as a calendar, is an old hymn board from a church.



while adding modern convenience," Sara says. A new floor plan opened the kitchen, dining, and side-by-side living areas of the main level and finished the attic to gain two additional bedrooms and a bath. Removing layers of 1970s paneling, 1900s wallpaper, and even cheesecloth from the walls as well as drop-ceiling tiles revealed architectural treasure. "All the walls and ceilings featured the original, unpainted shiplap," she says. "It took my breath away."

Painting the walls and most of the ceilings white (the living room still sports its natural wood finish) established the feeling of clean simplicity Sara wanted. "There seemed like there were a million possible choices in white paint," she says. "I opted for one that wasn't too buttery or too stark. This one

(Snowbound by Sherwin-Williams) is just a beautiful soft white." She also salvaged and reused all the home's wood floors (oak in public spaces and pine in the bedrooms), doors and hardware, woodwork, and original lighting fixtures. She replaced the cottage's windows but repurposed the originals to build a charming greenhouse in the backyard. She also reused some faucet handles as hooks in the mudroom.

Throughout the house, Sara's passion for combining family pieces with thrift store finds creates an air of welcoming, collected charm. "I love shopping garage sales the most because of the bargains," she says. "But I'm very intentional. I don't just buy everything. I want to keep my life—and surroundings—simple." □

For resources, see page 119.

“I WANTED A HOME THAT’S
SIMPLE,
CLEAN, COZY,
AND WARM.”

—homeowner Sara McDaniel



Left: A pair of folding wood seats along one wall of the library were salvaged from a Michigan theater. Sara cleverly surrounded the quote artwork with open books. *This photo:* Two sitting areas at the front of the house (a living room in the foreground and library beyond) now open to one another. Sara opted to keep the ceiling natural to instill warmth.





Clockwise, from above left: Sara's mother found the bench, knowing it would fit perfectly beneath this window beside the kitchen, and a friend made the pillows, which reference one of Sara's blogs, *Simply Sara*. Faux herbs wrapped in brown paper tied with twine bring simplicity and everlasting color to the kitchen windowsill. The kitchen remodel entailed a new farmhouse sink with an old look, white cabinets topped with quartz countertops, and a trio of windows to usher in daylight and cooling breezes. In the upper-level bath, an antique commode Sara found in a junk shop proved to be a perfect fit under the eaves and atop blue-and-white cement floor tiles that bring a punch of pretty pattern and color to the space. A spot to grow plants in the winter and enjoy the backyard in the summer, the new greenhouse is composed of the cottage's original windows and is home to a wicker settee Sara found on the roadside. The master bath is a testament to the union of beauty and practicality: waterproof laminate planks provide the look of wood; the ladder towel rack was another roadside find; and the vintage-look chandelier is an Amazon purchase. Sara considers the windmill-inspired ceiling fan a worthwhile splurge (she scoured the internet for the most affordable one she could find) as the statement piece for the master bedroom, a tranquil retreat thanks to her use of minimal color and warm wood tones against a white backdrop.



This photo: A pale blue on the beaded-board porch ceiling stems from Southern folklore that the hue repels everything from ghosts to insects. Sara brings dinner guests here to relax with dessert and coffee.



See more of Sara McDaniel's decorating ideas on her blog at simplysoutherncottage.com and on Instagram @[simplysoutherncottage](https://www.instagram.com/simplysoutherncottage).