



# CLARKSVILLE COTTAGE REIMAGINED

By Mauri Elbel Photography by Andrea Calo



*For a decade, Sharon Miller lived in a cramped  
450-square-foot cottage in Clarksville.  
But as a big fan of the outdoors, there was one little problem:  
she couldn't see it.*





It wasn't just the small size of her circa-1930's cottage that bothered Miller, who grew up in England before moving to the United States 25 years ago. Rather, the remodel was prompted by what her existing closed-off cottage lacked: a oneness with the outdoors, the ability to entertain friends, and those expansive floor-to-ceiling windows often found in London lofts that she nostalgically recalled. As an avid gardener, Miller wanted to be able to take in sights of her colorful vegetables and plump red tomatoes growing in her garden without having to walk outside.

"I love gardening and I wanted big windows to be able to see all of the efforts of my labor," Miller says. "There is so much beauty and greenery around the house, which is very peaceful and restful to me. And I couldn't see it. I also like entertaining and cooking and having my friends over, and I couldn't really do that in my little house."

It was Richard Hughes, principal and architect of Element 5 Architecture, who helped bring her visions to life with an in-



viting, light-filled redesign that now allows her to live, garden, work and entertain while feeling connected to the outdoors.

"Before it was too small — a tiny one-bedroom, one-bath which didn't open up into the side yard very nicely so she was actually living away from her yard," recalls Hughes. "She had a lot of items she wanted to achieve. She wanted a big open studio space both downstairs and upstairs. And aesthetically,



she wanted to preserve as much of the original cottage as possible, keeping it in context with the neighborhood while incorporating both modern farmhouse and British elements."

While the project didn't come without its challenges, spanning the neighborhood and city's restriction on the property as well as the client's desire to maintain certain elements of the original cottage along with unique layout requests, Hughes says in the end Miller gained the much-needed space she craved while maintaining the original feel of the existing Clarksville cottage.

The reimagined 1,750-square-foot space, with an additional 550-square-feet of covered porches and roof decks, is now the home of Miller's dreams. The white exterior, comprised of true cedar board and batten siding to replicate the existing character of the cottage and neighborhood, features glazed steel doors and expansive, divided-lite black-framed windows that give nod to British design and evoke an industrial feel. Inside the three-story farmhouse, exposed wood beams create vaulted height. The first floor exudes a loft-like feel and spills into an outdoor patio where an antique tin ceiling covers the space to create a unique, inviting entertaining area.

"I've always really liked tin ceilings and I looked for ages to find the right tin ceiling that had that mixture of old and new," says Miller. "This one made the space outside a little bit of its own. I feel like I am sitting in a Texas dancehall — enjoying the breeze and the outdoors."

A black Edwardian cast-iron fireplace Miller found in a London salvage yard and shipped back is now the anchor of her home. She says even though she can only use it once or twice during Austin's winter, she enjoys looking at it year-round.

"A lot of American rooms are centered around TVs," says Miller. "But to me, it's not the most pleasing center point of the room. There's something about gathering around a fireplace and hearth versus a television that I like much better."

Also a big fan of kitchens serving as the central gathering area of a home, Miller envisioned cooking and entertaining in an open, light-filled space. Her design fantasies came true

with her new kitchen where shiny stainless-steel appliances contrast with the exposed brick wall and warm maple wood while custom floating shelves illuminated with LED lighting further the industrial, urban feel she desired.

A small portion of the original house and front porch were kept intact to become the home's entry area. The second floor contains the master bedroom, studio area and balcony, which look out over undeveloped land south of 10th Street. A third-story attic is intended to be used as an overflow space for guests.

"Her home is now very light-filled and has this great loft feel," says Hughes. "I really enjoyed seeing the client's unique needs and wishes through and creating something that still really blends into the neighborhood with a new, exciting modern twist to it."

Miller would agree. Sometimes she says she feels like she's living in a treehouse.

"Everywhere you look you see trees and vegetables and tomatoes," she says. "I get to enjoy the pedestrian lifestyle and walk and ride my bike into the city, but I also get the best of nature, taking advantage of the greenery all around through huge windows."

Her reimagined cottage allows her to enjoy the best of both worlds, balancing urban life with nature's vistas. Sitting on a corner lot sprinkled with trees, neighboring houses aren't in immediate view so she can enjoy constant green views from any point in her house.

"Before what I had to do to enjoy the outside was to be outside," Miller says of the home that once made her feel claustrophobic and cramped. "Now there are windows everywhere — upstairs and downstairs — with a way directly outdoors. Anywhere I am, I can see the outside and then I can go outside. I am at the house a lot more now because I really love it — it is a wonderful place to be and inspirational as well. It is very nourishing to be there." ♦

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