

# ALMOST HEAVEN

When designer **Caroline Brackett** and her fiancé, Jodah Mullinax, discovered a historic **Pickens, South Carolina**, farmhouse with a view of the **Blue Ridge Mountains**, they knew they'd found their forever place. But just over a year into renovations, Jodah passed away unexpectedly. Now, Caroline is finishing what they started



BY BETSY CRIBB WATSON PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALISON GOOTEE STYLING BY KENDRA SURFACE



#### Don't Mess Up a Good Thing

The exterior required a refresh. "We loved the look of the house, but it didn't have insulation and some of the wood was rotten," says Caroline. They replaced the siding and painted it Benjamin Moore's Simply White (OC-117) to maintain the classic farmhouse facade. Keeping the green metal roof was a no-brainer. "I couldn't imagine it any other way!" she says.



#### Establish Some Roots

Because the kitchen was a new addition, Caroline intentionally chose warm fixtures and finishes that add character, like unlacquered brass hardware and bell jar lanterns from Visual Comfort & Co. The cabinets are painted Farrow & Ball's Treron (No. 292).



#### Make Room for Your Crowd

At her home on Midway Farm, Caroline's ethos of "the more the merrier" extends to her many pets, including six dogs—the five shown with her (above left) are Clyde, Chloe, Dodge, Doc, and Penny. In the cozy den (above right), she converted an antique linen press into a cocktail bar ideal for fuss-free yet elegant entertaining.

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ith its sweeping sunflower fields and a spectacular view of Table Rock Mountain in the distance, Midway Farm in Pickens, South Carolina, is the stuff of bucolic reverie. But the 1870s homestead that came with the 105 acres

wasn't always so picturesque. "The house was in such disrepair," recalls designer and homeowner Caroline Brackett. "There was no insulation in the walls, hardly any plumbing (just one tiny powder bath downstairs), and all the electrical had to be redone." But for her and her fiancé, Jodah Mullinax, it was near perfect. "I'd always wanted land and a lot of animals and space," she says. "He was very much into historic homes and relics." Where others saw a mess, the pair recognized potential, and they closed on the property in August 2020.

When renovations began, the duo's optimism about their new-old home proved to be well founded. Tearing out the laminate paneling on the walls uncovered real wood. Sanding the muddy red paint from the floors revealed hand-planed boards, likely hewed from pine trees on the property. Demolishing the drop ceilings gave way to loftier ones complete with their original planks. "Given the pandemic and how expensive everything was, I think I picked the worst time to renovate," says Caroline. But between her own background and that of her fiancé, they were better off than most homeowners would have been. "Jodah

was a builder, so he was the foreman," she says. "He was there every day overseeing things from the start."

The layout of the 19th-century farmhouse was simple: four rooms downstairs and four upstairs with a central hallway bisecting each floor. They expanded the footprint to make more space for their family of five (Caroline has three children: Fin, Josie, and Beau), adding a wing on either side of the house (to accommodate a primary suite and a large eat-in kitchen) as well as a screened porch on the back. "Marrying an old house with new construction from the foundation up is not easy, and I wanted those areas to feel like extensions of the original home," says the designer. "We had to find and source more antique heart-pine flooring, and that's the main thing that unifies the spaces."

The couple made changes to modernize the historic home's flow, too, knocking out walls that flanked a pair of original fireplaces in the living room and dining room. "It was Jodah's idea to take those down and have them be pass-through, walk-around spots," notes Caroline. "The beams that became the casings for the openings were salvaged from other parts of the house." Scraping off thick layers of stucco from the fireplaces unveiled original bricks, which were made in a kiln on the farm during the home's construction.



**Tip the Scales in Favor of Well-Balanced Spaces**  
 Caroline designed each room with its volume in mind. In the entry (above), where a drop ceiling was removed to reveal the sky-high original one, she leaned into its airy nature with a wash of Benjamin Moore's Swiss Coffee (OC-45). However, to prevent the dining room (above right) from feeling cavernous, she chose large pieces, like an eight-seater table and a hanging shade.



But just as the house began coming together that autumn, Caroline's world fell apart: Jodah passed away in a traffic accident on Thanksgiving Day in 2021. "When he died in November, there were no countertops; there was hardly running water," recalls Caroline. "It was not finished. We were living upstairs while we were completing the downstairs. It was a mess."

With their shared vision for Midway Farm as her guide, she pressed on with the restoration, building a 50-foot-long front porch and installing the industrial appliances she and Jodah had ordered together. "I think being a designer who deals with construction and renovations all the time really helped," she says. "If I had been someone who didn't have experience with this, it would have been much more difficult. It was quite a process."

By February 2022, the home was furniture ready. Jodah had weighed in on much of it. "We loved antiques and spent a lot of time together finding old pieces for the house," says the designer. "I wanted it to feel very lived-in and layered but not overdecorated—just authentic, I guess."

Caroline outfitted the expansive foyer with a 16-foot-long antique table she and Jodah had brought back from Mantiques in Brevard, North Carolina. "That piece was one of the first things we bought for the house," she says. "The hallway is so massive (12 feet

wide and 35 feet long), so we knew it would work there. We had the intention of pulling it to the middle of the space and using it for overflow dining."

Off the entry hall is the study, which the designer lovingly calls "mine room." It was the one place in the house where Jodah had asked for total decorating control. "Everything in here honors him," she says, from his guitar to an apothecary desk they found together.

That's not entirely the case across the hall in the dining room, where a French mirror managed to sneak its way into interiors dominated by American-made pieces. "Jodah probably wouldn't have cared for it—but it's been great, and I love it," says Caroline with a laugh. "It fits so perfectly that it's not even nailed in there but just wedged between the ceiling and the mantel." The 96-inch round table makes for easy formal entertaining, though the family typically eats in the kitchen's breakfast nook. "I love having a place for my kids and close friends to enjoy more casual, intimate meals together."

The kitchen, with its antique table turned island, has one of the best views in the house. Through a full corner of windows, you can see the mountains in the distance and, closer up, the 10 acres of sunflower fields that Jodah originally planted.

"I'm so thankful for many things, but we had talked about and decided on pretty much every aspect of the house," says Caroline. "We shared a vision for what it was going to be like, so I've been able to finish it. With every decision I make, I think, 'Would Jodah like this?' It was such a partnership, and I still feel him here."

**Know When To Leave It Be**

While the couple chose to brighten much of the home's original wood paneling with paint, they kept it as it was in Jodah's study. "It's such a warm, enveloping space, so I'm very glad we didn't paint this room," says Caroline, who rounded out the comfortable spot with handsome kilim pillows.

