

# Farm Fresh

A sportive couple constructs a casually elegant escape at The Ford Plantation—and *Allison Hersh* gets an exclusive tour. PHOTOGRAPHY BY RICHARD LEO JOHNSON

**A**WARD-WINNING INTERIOR DESIGNER Laura Lee Samford has decorated countless homes in her career, but she never actually built one—until now.

“I wanted something more informal, with a slightly primitive feel,” she muses. “I wanted to keep the space feeling big and open and breathing.”

This Watkinsville native and her husband, John, discovered The Ford Plantation, a luxury sporting community in Richmond Hill, after visiting relatives who owned homes there.

“We just fell in love with this place,” John says. “It’s an extremely friendly community.”

At the time, Laura Lee, a passionate equestrian, and John, an avid boater, were based in Birmingham, Alabama. Their active lifestyles inspired them to purchase their lot at The Ford Plantation in 2000, but they didn’t begin building their dream home until 2013.

Laura Lee worked closely with Ben Shepard and Darla Davis of Shepard and Davis Architects to design a home that would accommodate not just John and her, but Scarlett, their Irish setter, Rhett, their Gordon setter, and a host of visiting family and friends.

#### THE SAMFORD STATS

**Owners:** John and Laura Lee Samford

**Neighborhood:** The Ford Plantation

**Year built:** 2013-2014

**Year purchased:** Land acquired in 2000

**Square footage:** 4,492

**Accommodations:** 4 bedrooms, 4 full baths, 1 powder room

**Time to complete:** 14 months

**LOOK UP.** Many of the home’s details have personal roots. The ceilings in the dining room, for example, make generous use of reclaimed flooring and beams from Laura Lee’s ancestral home in Oconee County, which was built by her great-great-grandfather after the Civil War. She had layers of paint sanded from the pine, poplar and oak planks, allowing charming hints of gray, blue and green to peek through.







**LIVE LARGE.** The Samford family's living room offers a decidedly modern take on French Colonial-inspired style. Defined by a neutral palette of grays and silvers, the open space is anchored by a contemporary sofa and armchairs with rounded edges, which contrast with—but don't contradict—an old-fashioned cane bench.

**ELEGANT APPOINTMENTS**

Inspired by Southern vernacular architecture and European chic, Laura Lee and her architects set about imagining a comfortable, sophisticated interior.

"I've traveled to Italy and France, and they have stark modern furniture in these historic structures," she says. "I love the energy you get from that."

Blending traditional and modern elements, Laura Lee created a French colonial-inspired home with elegant appointments, from cut-crystal chandeliers to a vintage inspired claw foot bathtub. These upscale details contrast effortlessly with rustic farmhouse elements.

In fact, the home's design is remarkably practical, with the main living spaces—as well as the master bedroom and



master bath—located on the main floor. The second level welcomes guests, including the couple's three grown children and five grandchildren, throughout the year.

"I knew I needed a playroom for the grandchildren so they could make a wreck of the place," Laura Lee laughs. "And yet, I can have a nice family dinner downstairs and not feel like I'm stepping over toys."

**A GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY**

The four-bedroom home's layout was inspired by the Golden Mean, a classical system of proportions designed to promote harmony, balance and beauty. The Samfords paid special attention to lines of sight, hallway widths and symmetry, resulting in warm, inviting spaces that feel comfortable, not stodgy.



**MAKE ROOM FOR FUN.** The wide screened porch that runs along the rear of the house serves as an ideal gathering place for the couple to enjoy a quiet dinner or host a lively cocktail party. A generous heart pine table seats 14, and comfortable seating provides the perfect place to watch a football game with friends.





“It’s good karma to have balance and symmetry,” Laura Lee says. “I was exposed to old homes with 12- and 14-foot ceilings growing up. I love that grandness.”

**A STUDY IN CONTRAST**

The Samford home’s interiors incorporate generous use of modern and traditional elements, particularly in the open kitchen, which pairs sleek white Silestone with rustic heart pine countertops. Industrial-inspired lighting fixtures and a marble-topped modern breakfast table offers a welcome contrast to traditional white farmhouse-style cabinets and antique armchairs. Laura Lee even incorporated outdoor fabric in the stools that line the kitchen island, making them kid-proof and dog-resistant.

The emphasis is on chic, functional style, not on creating pristine, museum-like spaces.

“We don’t have any formal rooms that don’t get used,” Laura Lee asserts with pride.

Laura Lee uses color with restraint, allowing the home’s carefully curated furniture, textured walls and oversized windows to take center stage.

“If you get too many different colors, the room seems to get chopped up,” she observes. “I like color, but I’m reluctant to commit to a big splash of color you can’t change. I was looking for something that would endure and that I wouldn’t get bored with.”

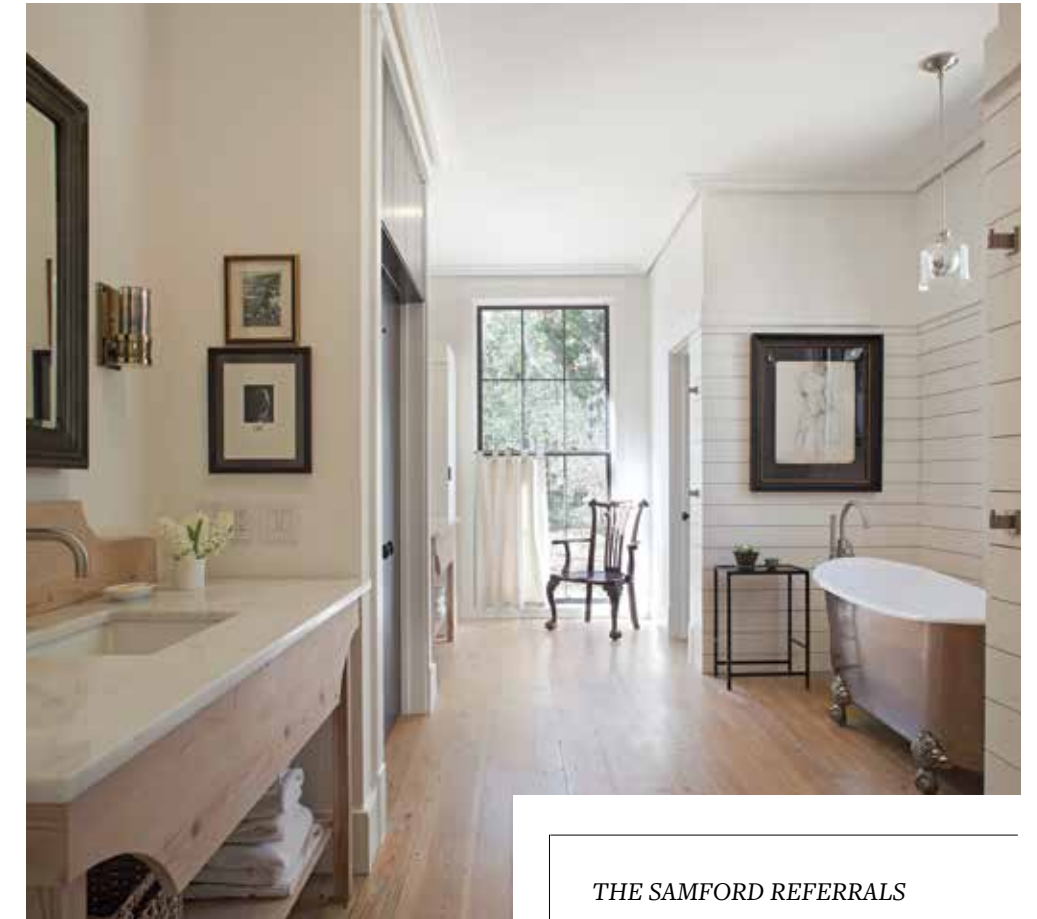
**PURPOSE AND RE-PURPOSE.** (top left) The oversized entry foyer, with its exposed brick floors, doubles as a dining room. A custom-designed wet bar, which incorporates vintage doors Laura Lee discovered at a downtown Savannah antique shop, combines traditional and modern influences.

**HONOR THE PAST.** (opposite page) The interiors are defined by high ceilings, natural light, exposed beams and an abundance of texture. In a nod to Georgia history—and to Laura Lee’s childhood summers on Cumberland Island—a custom-built tabby wall has been carefully constructed above the exposed brick fireplace in the living room.



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**THE SAMFORD REFERRALS**

**Architects/planners:** Ben Shepard and Darla Davis, Shepard and Davis Architects, in collaboration with owner Laura Lee Samford

**Interior designer:** Laura Lee Samford, LLS Furniture and Interior Design

**Contractor/builder:** Brian and Scott Grant, Grant Homes Inc.

**Flooring/ceilings:** Reclaimed heart pine and lumber from ancestral family home near Watkinsville

**Paint:** Benjamin Moore

**Windows:** Marvin

**Kitchen, bath and lighting design:** Laura Lee Samford, details fabricated by AWD of Savannah

**Landscape and hardscape design:** Thomas Angell, Verdant Enterprises

**Electrician:** Maxwell Electric

**HVAC:** Gerrald's Heating and Air

**Furniture:** Custom-designed pieces by Laura Lee Samford, family heirlooms, and items purchased from Alex Raskin Antiques and Arthur Smith Antiques

**Art:** Photographs by Mary Ruth Moore, painting by Dan Dunn, portrait by Albert Murray, charcoal drawing by Ellen Barbara Segner

**PARTY TIME**

John deferred to Laura Lee's impressive sense of style throughout the design and build process, but he knew he wanted plenty of outdoor living space for relaxing and entertaining.

The couple recently hosted a party for nearly 100 guests, using all the indoor and outdoor spaces on the main level.

"People could flow everywhere," Laura Lee reports. "It's a good party house, but it's also great for the two of us."

John and Laura Lee agree that the end result has truly exceeded their expectations on every level.

"I'm thrilled with how everything came together," John says, reclining in a plush armchair in the sunlit living room.

Laura Lee nods as she settles into a designer sofa and crosses her legs.

"We got the bones right," she smiles. "This really is our dream house." ■