

★Following a Pattern★

A North Carolina Colonial gets all-American appeal from a patriotic palette, traditional country treasures and plenty of handmade needle art.



By painting over stained woodwork, including the fireplace mantel, Sharon and Mark Stewart instantly brightened up their living room. Above the mantel, Sharon repurposed a salvaged red window as a frame for eight vintage stitchery pieces from the 1930s and 1940s. "Grouping them together makes a statement," she explains. She also uses her quilt collection to dress up the room; for example, the plush textiles fill a hearthside basket, embellish a nearby cabinet, and are draped across tables and chairs to contribute touches of color and pattern.



Sharon employed this doorless cabinet as a display piece in the retail store she once owned; today, it's the perfect place to stow and show some of her colorful collectible quilts. The glass jar full of baseballs not only pays homage to America's favorite summer pastime, but it also contains memories—each ball tells a story, from her sons' Little League games to their college and professional triumphs.



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Sharon Stewart can trace her affinity for all things red, white and blue

to her days as a bride-to-be planning a July wedding in 1976, when the United States' bicentennial celebration was in full swing. "I think my love of Americana probably started way back then," she says. "And, of course, with red being my favorite color, it was easy to work with that palette." The classic color scheme has seen Sharon and her husband, Mark, through more than 20 years of decorating their Raleigh, North Carolina, Colonial-style home, where red shows up in every space, giving the interior a sense of continuity—and allowing Sharon the freedom to move things from room to room.

The couple considered downsizing after their two sons grew up and moved out, but all the hard work they poured into the abode's decor made it impossible for Sharon to imagine calling any other place home. So, they decided to stay put and give the home a facelift, including painting the woodwork and cabinetry, updating the fixtures and adding a large porch.

Originally re-covered to match a cottage-style bedroom, this pair of armchairs proved a better fit for the living room, says Sharon, who spruced one up with a pillow stitched from remnants of damaged antique coverlets. The bold grouping of wall art pays homage to her love of flags and includes patterns of her own design, the work of other crafters and several actual flags. A rustic star adds even more three-dimensional character to the display and echoes the flags' patriotic motif and the design on the texture-rich wicker basket under the table.

ABOVE: Handmade stencils give Sharon's living room walls a one-of-a-kind look. Stars enliven the textured blue wallpaper on the lower walls; at the top of the walls, phrases such as "United We Stand" and "One Nation Under God" create a patriotic border. Instead of a bulky sofa, roomy chairs provide ample seating and make the area seem more spacious. To tie the room's palette together, Sharon chose navy drapes with red, white and blue striped valances that contribute a regal touch to the comfortable room.

RIGHT: The Stewarts added the wraparound porch a few years ago. Neighbors refer to it as the "Cracker Barrel" porch because of the row of rocking chairs that beckon guests.

The Stewarts started with a small fix: painting over the stained trim in the dining room. When that modest project turned out well, they moved on to the rest of the house, sprucing up everything from the kitchen cabinets to the fireplace mantel. They've even used paint to make some sturdy, yet stodgy, old furniture look new, including their 1980s-era maple dining set. In addition to updating their style, maximizing storage and display space was another undertaking. Sharon and Mark added built-in cabinets and shelving to both the living room, where dozens of books line the wall, and the dining room, where country accents pop against the white background of just a few open shelves and a glass-doored cupboard.

Sharon's decorating talents have often prompted friends and neighbors to seek her advice on color choices and furniture selection, so much so that





Rather than replace their outdated wood cabinetry, the Stewarts revived it with a fresh coat of white paint and new hardware. Solid-surface countertops, slate flooring and updated light fixtures complete the affordable transformation. Bright-red pendant lights over the sink add a burst of color that suits the home's patriotic palette and bring out the bold hue of the tole-painted tray and the framed artwork on the counter.



One of Sharon's favorite quilts tops the breakfast table, where it complements the blue-and-white china. Sharon stitched the blue-and-white-striped valances with red gingham trim to carry out the eating area's patriotic theme. Filled with cookbooks, yellowware bowls and tiny vintage teacups, the cabinet provides a perch for some of the bird figures Sharon has gathered over the years.

"If you want to make your home represent you, you need to let go of some stuff. It gives you the freedom to enjoy what you truly love."

she was inspired to start her own business, Liberty Designs and Interiors. Working through a local store, she helps clients with decorating issues ranging from paint selection to home staging, following the business motto: "Making the most of what you have to give your home a whole new look."

And, that's certainly a philosophy Sharon stands by in her own home. Describing her style as "plain, simple and homey," she notes that, although she still displays her favorite country collectibles (quilts, vintage stitcheries, flag-themed items, sewing notions and Rowe pottery) throughout her home, she's thinned the ranks a bit. "I used to be one of those people with things on every surface, but I found that I needed to de-clutter in order to de-stress my life," she says.

In her decorating, Sharon has discovered that a less-is-more mantra has paid off, and she often encourages clients to shed their own excess belongings. "I don't have 'stuff' everywhere; it can be overwhelming. If you



Sharon pairs a whimsical hooked rug, which she made from another designer's pattern, with a doll chair, a pear-shaped gourd, a couple of small bird figurines and some vintage cheese graters to create a simple, yet artful, vignette in the kitchen.

WOOL APPLIQUÉ FOR BEGINNERS

With a pattern-designing business and a hobby teaching sewing classes, Sharon Stewart knows a thing or two about fabric crafts, especially when wool is involved. "Wool is my favorite textile to work with when creating new pattern designs and accent pieces for my home," Sharon says. "It is very forgiving and easy to manipulate, and it comes in a wide variety of colors and textures." Here are some of Sharon's tips on getting started with wool appliqué, which was used to create the baseball-themed "America" pillow in our giveaway (see page 15):



Americana aficionados
Sharon and Mark enjoy the fresh summertime air in the backyard garden of their Raleigh, North Carolina, home.

■ **ONCE MORE, WITH FELTING:** Felted wool has been treated for easier use by being washed in hot water, rinsed in cold water and dried in a hot dryer, which keeps it from fraying and unraveling during use. To felt your own wool, start with fiber that is 80 to 90 percent wool. Place the wool in a washing machine and add a small amount of mild detergent. Wash it in hot water; rinse it in cold. Place the wool in the dryer with a fabric softener sheet and a fluffy towel, and dry it thoroughly.

■ **FREEZE!** Use freezer paper to trace over shapes that you can cut out to make appliqué patterns. Lay freezer paper over

your desired design, shiny side down, and trace around the object. Using sharp scissors, cut just outside the traced line. (You will cut on the line later.)

■ **CUT IT OUT.** Place the freezer-paper shape, shiny side down, on top of the felted wool and press with a dry iron on the wool setting. The paper will stick to the wool just enough to allow you to cut out the design following the tracing lines. This technique will give you a nice, clean cutout. After cutting out the shapes, remove the paper.

■ **IN A STITCH.** Place the cutout pieces on a wool background in your desired

arrangement, and secure them with straight or appliqué pins. Using embroidery floss or thread, stitch the wool pieces in place using a tack, blanket or buttonhole stitch. (To download a handy stitch guide, visit www.countrysamplermagazine.com and click on Free Projects under the Decorating tab.) Experiment with various types and sizes of threads to create different effects.

■ **FULL STEAM AHEAD:** With the iron on the wool setting, steam-press the wool background from the wrong side to get any wrinkles out. Complete your piece as desired to make a place mat, a table runner, a wall hanging, a pillow or a framed piece.



Built-in cabinetry contributes much-needed storage to the dining room; plus, it provides open areas for displaying decor and convenient counter space for serving. Instead of buying a new dining set, the Stewarts refinished their

25-year-old maple table and chairs with paint and stain, and re-covered the chair cushions in a wide-stripe fabric that fits the home's Americana theme. "It looks like a brand-new set," Sharon says enthusiastically.



To make this guest room a welcoming space for the couple's granddaughters, Sharon painted the walls a caramel hue and filled the cabinet with childhood treasures, such as mohair teddy bears and vintage storybooks (including Mark's old Hardy Boys novels). Above the bed, a painted sign gives the illusion of a headboard. Sharon bought the oak cabinet at an auction 25 years ago; since then, the versatile piece has served in nearly every room in the house.



Win a Wool-Appiqué Pillow!

Hit a decorating home run with a baseball-themed wool-appliqué pillow handmade by pattern designer and decorator Sharon Stewart of Liberty Rose Patterns.

Fill out our online entry form at www.countrysamplermagazine.com (click on Issue Links or visit the Contests & Promotions link under the Magazine tab), or send a 3½" x 5" postcard with your name, address and daytime phone number to: Baseball Pillow Giveaway, c/o Country Sampler, Dept. JM, 707 Kautz Road, St. Charles, IL 60174. Deadline for entries is July 31, 2009. Only one entry per household or address. See the online contest page for complete rules for entering.

"There is something I love in every room. It's a happy place—life is short and we need to be happy."

want to make your home represent you, you need to let go of some stuff. It gives you the freedom to enjoy what you truly love," she explains. Many of the treasured items that adorn the Stewarts' home are Sharon's handiwork—she's been a fan of needle arts since childhood, when she watched her grandmother and mother crochet and sew. In adulthood, that seed has blossomed into a passion for creating patterns; since 2002, she's made more than 100 designs for hooked rugs, felted table runners and pillows, and stitcheries for framing, which she sells through her wholesale company, Liberty Rose Patterns. She also teaches classes in embroidery and wool appliqué at a gift store.

Whether it's tackling a client's room makeover, teaching a sewing class, designing a pattern or decorating her own home, all of Sharon's interests seem to be linked. "I am doing what I am supposed to be doing," she says. "All the things I love to do go hand in hand." That sense of purpose is reflected in her contentment with her own surroundings. "I love my house," she says. "There is something I love in every room. It's a happy place—life is short and we need to be happy." ★

FOR MORE INFORMATION, SEE RESOURCE GUIDE, PAGE 150.