

Starting Over in St. Michaels: Historic estate offers the perfect backdrop for a D.C. transplant's creative side

[Cate Reynolds](#) Jan. 13, 2016 12:53 p.m.

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By Carol Sorgen // Photography by Stephen Buchanan

Alice Marie Gravely had visions of finding a second home that would be a retreat from her hectic career in telecommunications in the nation's capital. She found that home when she bought the mid-19th century Beverly Manor in St. Michaels more than a decade ago. What she also found was that the trip across the Bay Bridge to her old lifestyle was becoming less appealing... so much so that she gave up her D.C. days and is now a full-time resident of the Eastern Shore, immersed in her life as an artist and printmaker,

construction of a new art gallery, and the community affairs of her adopted hometown.

One of the most important historic estates in the Tidewater region, Beverly Manor is located on 10 acres just outside of St. Michaels, surrounded on three sides by the San Domingo and Harris creeks on a peninsula known as Hopkins Point. Unlike many Eastern Shore residents, Gravelly is not a sailor herself, but enjoys the views provided by 1,200 feet of deep waterfront, along with the tree-lined lane with manicured lawns and mature specimen trees leading to the house.

Originally a plantation of 1,500 acres, the Beverly tract was purchased in 1837 by an Easton tailor by the name of John C. Harper, who was also a gentleman farmer and active in Talbot County church and public affairs, running for the Maryland House of Delegates and serving as a county commissioner.

Harper began construction of the domestic revival manor house in 1857, turning his tailor's attention to detail to every element of the impressive home he was creating for his wife and eight children. His two-and-a-half story, ell-shaped center hall frame house was a Tidewater interpretation of the Italianate style combined with Victorian architectural features. During the early 20th century, significant alterations were made in the Colonial Revival style including replacement of the front porch and addition of a columned portico and porch. Inside, the house today still retains much of its original mid-19th century woodwork, including a period staircase with mahogany newel post and turned balusters that support a continuous molded handrail that rises to the third floor.

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Beverly Manor remained in the Harper family until 1908 when the Harper heirs sold the house and 200 acres to Dr. John A. Bodine. In 1918, the house was purchased by Chicago resident C.E. Schaff, who journeyed to Easton in his private rail car—fitting for his role as vice president of the New York Central Railroad. After World War I, the property was sold several times, with the farmland remaining with the house until the early 1950s when it was divided into smaller parcels.

Gravelly purchased the home in 2003, and in 2009 began working with

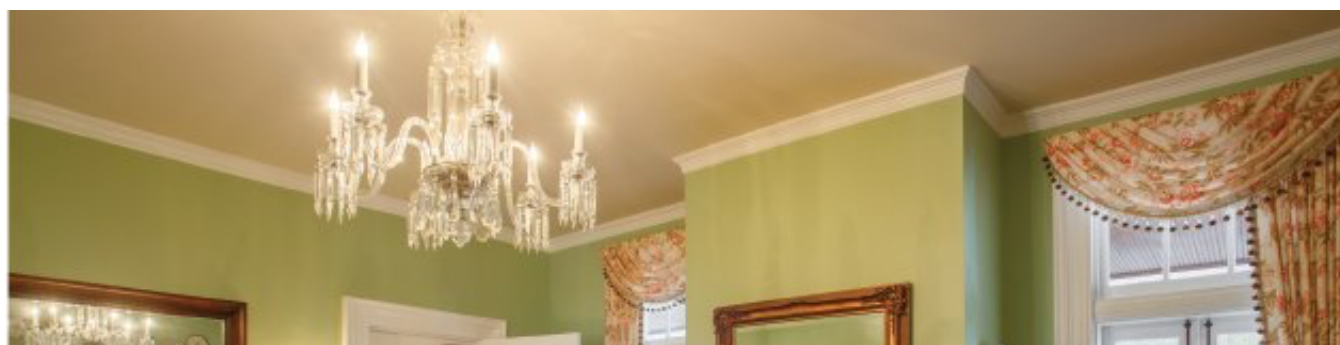
Easton architect Christine Dayton on further updates, including the addition of a new wing that incorporates a kitchen, master bedroom, office, artist's studio, and garage. The new construction and restoration of the original manor house was overseen by William Wroten of Wroten's Construction in Preston.

"Because the house is on both the Maryland and Talbot County Historic Registers, we had to follow strict guidelines when it came to changes we could make," says interior designer Suzanne Hanks, owner of S. Hanks Interior Design in Oxford, who was closely involved with the project from conception to completion.

Heeding the guidelines, both Gravely and Hanks made certain that both the exterior and the interior of the 10,000-square-foot home would reflect its origins. "This is a very historic house and though it has been updated, we wanted the decor to be in keeping with the home's original style, while still giving it a fresh look," Hanks says. The mix of contemporary and traditional was accomplished, for example, by pairing the original dining room chandelier with new wall sconces, placing antique side tables atop wide-planked pine floors, and forgoing wallpaper for faux paintings done by Easton decorative painter Maggii Sarfaty.

In the living room, Hanks took her color cues from an over-mantel painting that is believed to be original to the mantelpiece. The sunny yellow-gold walls and sky-blue upholstered sofas complement the landscape and are highlighted by crisp white molding and architectural elements.

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Other rooms are more subdued in tone, from the taupe and rose (to complement the rose marble fireplace) in the library to the spring green in the dining room, but all have a serenity—and plenty of plush seating—to beckon visitors to settle in.

Despite the fact that the homeowner is an artist, she readily admitted that interior design wasn't her area of expertise and told Hanks from the outset, "I'm putting this in your hands."

"Obviously I presented everything for her approval," Hanks says with a laugh, adding that the entire process took several years and along the way she and the homeowner became good friends, not an unlikely occurrence given how much time they spent together.

Though Gravelly had no intention of resettling on the Eastern Shore, she found a new home in Beverly Manor and a welcoming community in St. Michaels.

"She's very happy," Hanks says.

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