



Sixty Chickens & Five Boys,
HOMESTEAD
on the Shore

By Jeanne Blackburn | Interior Photography by David Burroughs | Exterior Photography by *Annapolis Home Magazine*

When Tracy and Andy Hightower were looking for a new home in the Annapolis area, they knew just what they wanted. Eager to enjoy all that the Annapolis area had to offer, they also hoped to find a place on the water with enough space for their five young boys to spread out and grow up close to nature.

“We looked for three years to find just the right place that met our vision for how and where we wanted to raise our family,” says Tracy. Tracy grew up on a farm in Kentucky; they hoped to teach their boys the ways of the land and to share its special rhythms and rewards. What they found was on the Shore and when they bought the place in 2012 it was a spacious, six-year-old home with 900 feet of shoreline, a pool, two ponds, and 22 acres of land to accommodate a garden, orchards, chickens, honeybees, and the two dogs that are now part of their lives.

But nothing is perfect.

As ‘adjustments’ were made to the house those first few years, the list of things to be done kept growing with the boys.

In 2017, enter Lisa Bagbey Tullai, interior designer of Annapolis Interiors. “I found her on the internet, looked at her work, and realized that she and I were on the same page,” Tracy says. According to Lisa, “We set up a date and time for me to meet her and visit the home. During that first in-person meeting, I discovered there was so much more behind Tracy’s description of her family, home, lifestyle, and interior needs. That led to a three-year-long journey of working together to transform many areas of their home.”

Tracy likes to cook and spends a lot of time in the kitchen. Unfortunately, the kitchen needed immediate attention: in fact, it required a total renovation. The kitchen was positioned at the intersection of two halls that created a crossroads that led from one side of the house to the other. Really inefficient, they both decided. “For four or five months we had no kitchen, and that



The Hightower Family

A dine-in breakfast nook overlooks the marsh, lawn, gardens, and beehives. The peaceful scene is no accident; each family member has daily chores.



The pre-existing kitchen, once dark and narrow, has been opened up and framed with wood and stone beams and walls. All materials, including lighting, hardware, and appliances were readily sourced from The Annapolis Design District.



was during Thanksgiving and Christmas,” says Tracy. “We cooked on a hot plate in the small kitchen in the basement.” In addition, the laundry room was woefully small and cluttered with coats and shoes: very inadequate for a family of seven.

Tullai discovered that decoratively, Tracy wanted a more cohesive, room-to-room aesthetic for her home’s interior. Given all the children and the dogs, the furnishings they had were not performing well. In addition, the new master suite, added before Lisa started working with them, featured a wall of windows that needed some serious light control.

Tullai proposed exploring the possibility of physically expanding their home and transforming it, which meant going beyond surface finishes. “I recommended that they consider doing an interior renovation with two additions: a great room off the back of the house to become the dining/sunroom adjacent to a renovated kitchen, and larger mud and laundry room off the front to include a pantry.” Both of the additions would provide more square footage and improve the exterior aesthetic as well. “We also discussed adding a covered portico off the front of the house as an invitation to enter while being shielded from the weather,” she said.

To address the decorative issue in the most highly frequented rooms of the house, Lisa and Tracy selected well-constructed furnishings and performance fabrics. In the master suite, motorized shutters, light-filtering shades, and blackout window treatments were installed for adjustable light control.



Over 20 eggs ranging in color were gathered during the photoshoot.

The chickens roam freely but operate under a rigid hierarchy or “pecking order.” New chicks are not readily welcomed. Violence erupts when the lead hen is challenged.





Interior designer Lisa Tullai used tough yet beautiful fabrics and furnishings, designed to hold up to dogs and children.



This bee hive hides a complex miniature society. After returning to the hive, the worker bee transfers the nectar from her tongue to another worker's tongue, where the liquid from the nectar evaporates and becomes honey.

By placing the dining area in the addition off the back of the house, they were able to eliminate the traffic flow through the kitchen. Now that the large pantry, laundry room, mudroom, and dog feeding station are housed in the addition at the front of the house, the congestion and intrusion in the main kitchen area have been greatly reduced.

One hall bathroom and the powder room on the main level have also been renovated. Current projects include two additional bathrooms, a hobby room (filled with all manner of fishing gear), and some basement areas.

As the boys have grown, this house has grown with them. It now sprawls across the horizon, balanced on either side by its two additions. It has become a proper homestead, where the boys take the primary responsibility for the farm animals and plenty of

gardens. Tracy's small flock of chickens has expanded to sixty. The coop now has netting on all sides, a huge run, nesting boxes, and a special section for chicks and juveniles to mature until they're ready to join the pecking order. The boys gather approximately 250 eggs a week. An ongoing experiment, the beehives literally hum with activity as the precious liquid is produced and harvested. Orchards and gardens are filled with flowers and vegetables.

Commercial farming is an embattled industry; however, this bustling homestead on the Shore occupies a simpler sphere. The family farm—at least the mini-farm—still retains its ability to encourage responsibility, respect for each other, and a love of the land—and thrives only thirty minutes or so from Annapolis. **AH**

INTERIOR DESIGN: Annapolis Interiors, Lisa Tullai, Annapolisinteriors.com, Annapolis, Maryland

BACKSPLASH & TILE: Compass Stone & Tile Studio, cst-studio.com, Annapolis, Maryland

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