Preserving Memories

Borrowers Restore 1964 Family Farmhouse

The Hutton family, from left to right, Cecilia Ann, Shannon, Sam, Benjamin, Ben and Marie, with their puppy June

When borrowers Ben and Shannon Hutton took on their farmhouse remodel in Athens, the main draw was the history that the home held. Shannon's mother grew up there, and her family had maintained the farm since 1964. Harold and Marie Smith, Shannon's grandparents, built the house in 1964, raised their children there and farmed the surrounding land. They grew cotton, raised livestock and had extensive gardens.

The Smiths also produced pork and had a smokehouse on the farm where they smoked about 500 hams a week under the name Smith Brothers Hams. All of this farming parlayed well into their main business — running their family-owned L & S Grocery stores, where they were able to market some of the harvest from their garden.

Most of the family stayed close by, in what they called "Smith Village." Shannon grew up a few houses down the road and spent much of her childhood roaming the farm and helping her grandmother in her immaculate flower gardens. Her grandfather added a swimming pool and tennis courts as his family grew so that everyone would have a place to gather and enjoy plenty of entertainment.

When Ben and Shannon married in 2000, their wedding reception was held on the property. As their own family expanded with the addition of Cecilia Ann, 15, Marie, 13, Benjamin, 9, and Sam, 5, the grandkids also made fond memories there playing and helping their great-grandmother pick apples from the backyard tree for baking.

After Shannon's grandparents passed away, the Huttons knew they wanted to keep the farm in the family. The house, however, at almost 50 years of age, would need quite a bit of maintenance and redesign to make it work for their family of six. To help them make this dream happen, Ben and Shannon contacted Jason Thomas at Alabama Farm Credit.

They began the renovation in August 2013 and quickly realized it was going to be more work than they originally anticipated. They found some major structural problems, and after getting an architect involved, ended up having to take the house down to the studs.

"We consulted with several different experts and asked each one 'Is it worth it? Should we just tear it down and start over?'" Shannon remembers. Each time they were told that the house was salvageable — if they had the patience for it.

After two years of construction, sweat and a few tears, the Huttons were finally able to move into the remodeled and restored house in June 2015. They still had a few small things left to do but were able to finish it out while living there. Today they say that they have no regrets about the project.

Due to extensive structural problems, they were able to incorporate some features that they otherwise would not have. They altered the floorplan, moving the staircase and opening up some spaces for a more open concept. They also used every inch of the once-wasted attic space to make unique nooks and cubbies for the children's rooms. And to ensure that structural problems don't resurface, they have a very unique, scientific, climate-controlled crawl space.

While the house no doubt had a major overhaul, the Huttons are proud that they were able to preserve the details of its history. They incorporated many of the original doors and fixtures as well as several pieces of furniture. But the main thing they hold on to are the memories.

"I remember my grandmother sitting in her chair looking out these windows into her flower gardens and marveling over them to me," Shannon says. "And my children have fond memories of visiting her here, and they love knowing they live in the same house their grandmother and great-grandparents lived in."

Shannon and Ben have big plans for the future of the farm. Ben plans to add some cattle to the farm, and they've just expanded their family with the addition of a new puppy, June. Much like her grandfather before her, Shannon enjoys entertaining, and her next project is turning the barn into a haven for just that. For now, though, they enjoy having the open space and watching their children run and play all around Smith Village.