

lifestyle

Fernside Cottage was an 1835 stone house overgrown with vines and weed trees when Dennis bought it in 1993. The living spaces are on the second floor, the kitchen, is in the glass wing behind the terrace. A guest bedroom and Dennis' office are downstairs. In October 2008, a glass addition, hidden by the trees on the right, was finished for the master suite and Richard's office.



by Lita Solis-Cohen
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Fernside Cottage

A Collection of
Collections



THIS PAGE TOP:

In the entry is a collection of miniature watercolors on paper by David Ellinger (1913–2003), an antiques dealer and artist who painted theorems and fraktur inspired by nineteenth-century Pennsylvania German examples. Dennis acquired them at a Pook & Pook Auction and then mounted the framed paintings on a board.

THIS PAGE BELOW:

Displayed on recessed glass shelves, rainbow spatterware creates a symphony of color in the main first floor entry; each piece plays its part in orchestrating color cords. Dennis first discovered spatterware at Pennypacker's auctions near Reading, Pennsylvania, when he was a teenager collecting Historical Blue Staffordshire. "A friend of my mother's collected spatter and I would buy some for her at auctions, and when she didn't want what I bought, I kept it," he said. His collection, which fills three alcoves, is exclusively rainbow spatter, four- and five-color stripes, festoons, pinwheel, and bull's eye patterns on full and child size tableware. This collection is complete; when something comes in something must go out.

Two dozen species of hosta line the path to the door of Fernside Cottage, a field-stone house tucked into a hillside by a creek. Open the door and find a veritable shower of rainbow spatterware; the English pearlware festooned, draped, and striped in prism colors. Move on to the stair hall and be heralded by two towers of graduated stoneware crocks painted with cobalt deer, birds, or flowers. "It is all about graphics," says Dennis, a designer, landscaper, restorer of old houses, and unstoppable collector.

This 1835 tenant house was overgrown with vines and weed trees when Dennis bought it in 1993. For two years he lived in a coach house he built on the property while renovating the main house and planting the garden. This self-confessed "chronic collector since childhood" had begun amassing his extensive collections of mechanical banks, cast-iron toys, historical blue and flow blue Staffordshire, weather-vanes, art pottery, Rockingham-glaze





yellow ware, redware, and American furniture, long before he met his partner, Richard, who has become passionate about mocha dipped ware. Dennis' collection had already outgrown his house before Richard moved in. Their solution was to build an addition, completed in 2008, a glass cube above the garage, for a master suite and Richard's office.

Dennis says his mother is the source of his collecting addiction. "At Christmas and on my birthdays I didn't want new toys, I wanted old toys, so she would take me to an antique toyshop where I could pick out something old. I usually got a cast-iron toy or a penny bank." When he was a bit older, Dennis would take the train to Philadelphia, where he would fill his pockets with chestnuts from the street vendors and head for Pine Street and the antiques dealers who were his tutors. When he could drive, he went to New Hope and to the Montgomery

County dealers' antiques shows in Pottstown on weekends.

At age nineteen, while working for his father in the commercial refrigeration business, Dennis was able to make enough money to cover the mortgage on his first house; soon he was fixing it up and planting a garden. While watering the plants one day, a woman walking by asked if he knew of a house like his she could buy, "I told her that she could have mine for a price," says Dennis. "I sold it to her and with the proceeds bought two more houses, fixed them up and sold them, and soon I was in the real estate business making enough money to buy antiques." Dennis then purchased a farm in Kennett Square and later relocated to Vancouver, Canada. When he returned to Pennsylvania in the early nineties, the depressed real-estate market presented him with buying opportunities, one of which was Fernside Cottage.

Two sky lights flood the room with light in the daytime and Tiffany lamps, circa 1910, and recessed lighting illuminate the space at night. The images of large green hydrangea leaves picked from the Fernside garden were photographed by Tom Crane of Bryn Mawr. The leaf motif is echoed in the Grueby vase on the window sill. The sand color of the upholstery and sisal rugs continue the inside outside garden theme of the house as does the ficus tree. In the living room, dining room, and hallways, oriental carpets replace the summer rugs in winter.

FACING PAGE:

A menagerie of animal weathervanes, along with a lady liberty, a plough, six banners, and a lightening rod begins in the entry and continues up to the two-story high living room wall. They are mounted on the bare chimney wall, bringing the outside inside. Dennis designed the furniture in the living room, which was made by a local craftsman. A collection of Kurdish bag faces dating from 1890 to 1930 serve as cushions on the low seating pod. The sculpture on the coffee table—carved from one piece of wood — was made in 2007 by Hunt Clark (b. 1969) in Sparta, Tennessee, and purchased at the Philadelphia Crafts Show.





THIS PAGE TOP AND BOTTOM:

A large tankard made by William Will, Philadelphia (1764–1798); an English pint tankard is by George Grenfell, London (1760–1775) Samuel Boardman flagon from Hartford, Connecticut, circa 1825, and a smaller flagon by Boardman & Company, New York (1825–1827), along with a large plate and the small plate, marked Richard Austin, Boston (1792–1807), and a coffee pot made by H. B. Ward in Connecticut are on the tiger maple chest at the end of the hallway. The cool gray satin surface of the pewter contrasts with the warmth of the tiger maple chest. The patterns and colors work with the collage by Burt Wasserman (b. 1929).

Transfer-printed Historical Blue Staffordshire was Dennis' second collection as a young boy, after cast iron toys and banks. "I started collecting the "Landing of Lafayette at Castle Garden." A tureen and ladle in the pattern are on the dining room table. The Dutch cupboard, the window sill, and corner shelves are filled with more "Landing of Lafayette" and various American scenes on platters, plates, pitchers, and bowls. There are plates and platters, wash bowls, a pitcher and a cup plate, with the arms of Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North and South Carolina, and Georgia. The "Arms of Pennsylvania," platter, the Holy Grail in Historical Blue, was purchased from Jeff de Hart at Conestoga Auctions in Manheim, Pennsylvania, who persuaded its previous owner, living in South Africa, to send it to his auction. Other historical blue dinner ware proclaims "Peace and Plenty," a suitable theme for a dining room. The Baltimore Federal bird's-eye maple card table, circa 1800, inspired Dennis to design the curly maple extension dining table made by a local craftsman; the chairs are from Ikea. All share the warm mellow color of the refinished walnut Pennsylvania tall-case clock purchased in the 1970s. The oil painting is by Tom Gaines, a contemporary New Jersey artist who painted it for the space.





THIS PAGE CLOCKWISE FROM UPPER LEFT:

The kitchen is lit with skylights and a glass wall that opens onto the front terrace.

To unify the interior and exterior spaces, Dennis used masonry paving matrix for the floors of the terrace and throughout the house; the exterior and interior walls are all reinforced concrete. The blending of contemporary materials and period furnishings is seen at the end of the hallway where, placed against a concrete wall, a Connecticut tiger-maple chest of drawers, becomes a pedestal for a collection of pewter.

When he lived in Vancouver from 1988 to 1993, Dennis bought a dozen portraits by Mildred Valley Thornton (1890–1967), who, in the 1930s, working directly in oil on canvas, recorded the last of the living Indian chiefs of the Pacific Northwest. When the Canadian government refused to accept her collection on behalf of the people of Canada, Thornton left a codicil in her will directing that the paintings be burned upon her death. The paintings were not burned but dispersed to museums in Canada and to private collections. These four are in the hallway next to a powder room, four more are in the master bathroom, and others are in storage.





Mechanical banks, made from the 1870s to the 1920s, were the first things Dennis collected. "I joined the Mechanical Bank Collectors of America when I was fourteen," he says. "My mentor was the legendary collector Leon Perelman, before he opened his short lived Perelman Toy Museum in Philadelphia." He adds, "I used to spend Saturday or Sunday afternoon at his house." Dennis bought many of the same banks in various colors. Among his collection are some now considered politically incorrect, reflecting prejudice against African Americans, Jews, Irish, and Italians.

BOTTOM:

Richard was not a collector until he met Dennis. "We would go to auctions and antiques shows and Dennis would come home with treasures and I'd come home with nothing until I zoomed in on mocha," he says. "I just love all the patterns, forms, and colors of mocha; they are so contemporary and timeless. I try to buy pieces without repairs, and with minimal chips." The procession of mocha pitchers and a tower of bowls on recessed shelves, one of two in Richard's office, and the leaded glass Oak Leaf shade on the Tiffany lamp on his desk echo the changing colors of the trees and plantings outside.



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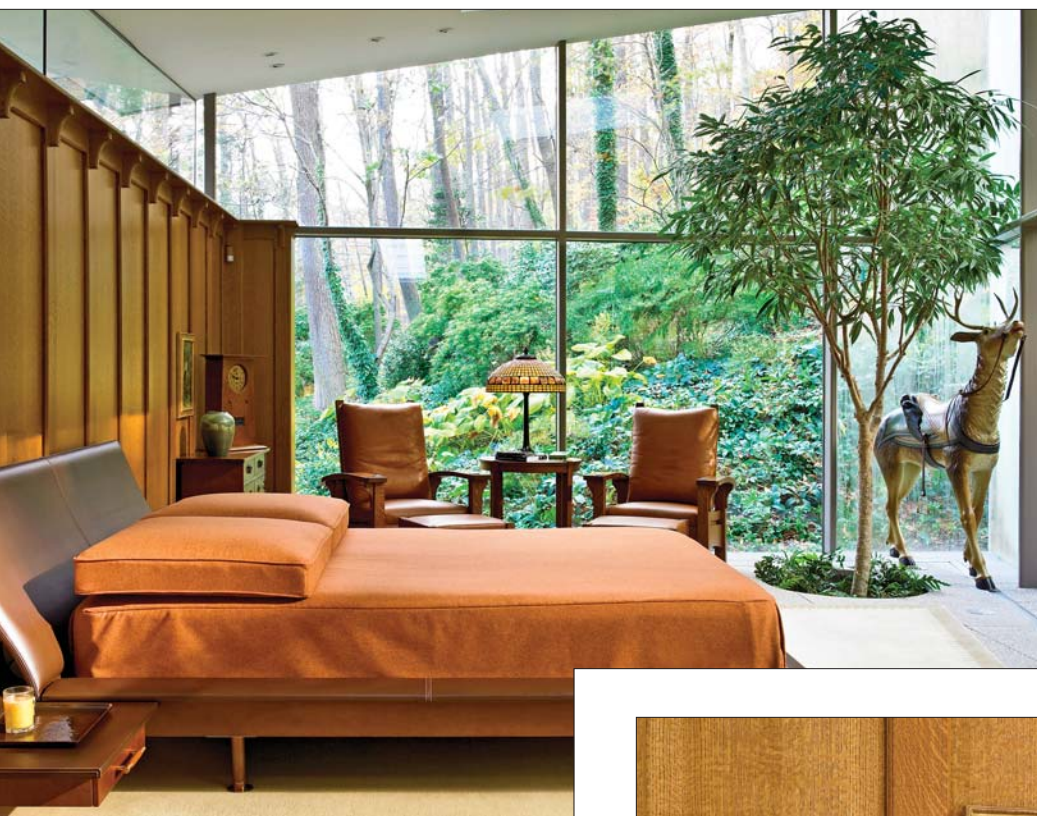
The house had been part of the Gladwyne Colony, a psychiatric community founded by Dr. Seymour DeWitt Ludlum (1876–1956), who turned a nineteenth-century mill town into a sanitarium. He believed hard work and fresh air was the cure for mental illness. One of his most famous patients was the artist Alice Neel, (1900–1984). Already an artist, Dr. Ludlum encouraged her to paint as part of her cure. In 1967, the sanitarium closed and the property was sold to John Dorrance who tore down most of the dilapidated mill buildings; Fernside cottage was spared. Dennis bought the cottage and

The art pottery collection began ten years ago with the purchase of a blue Newcomb College vase. Most of the vases are signed by artists working at Newcomb College, Rookwood, or Marblehead, and there are a few pieces of early Van Briggle. Lately, Grueby has become Dennis and Richard's favorite.

a few wooded acres from the Dorrance estate.

In Vancouver Dennis had worked with architect Dan White. For the cottage renovation, Dennis invited White to Pennsylvania. They gutted the termite ridden interior and collaborated on the cottage renovations. The 1835 house had a living room, dining room, and kitchen downstairs and sleeping quarters upstairs. But the views of the creek, woods,

and garden were from the second floor so they flipped the plan so that the sleeping rooms and office were downstairs, where less light is needed, and the living areas are upstairs with the views. While renovating the house, Dennis was also working on reclaiming the overgrown garden, and soon the neighbors took notice. “When they saw what I was doing,” says Dennis, “they asked me to design



FACING PAGE:

The Tiffany floor lamp, with its curtain glass border and pigtail finial, glows at night and echoes the yellow-green hostas in the garden in the daytime. The Gustav Stickley desk designed by the architect Harvey Ellis provides a place for a select collection of sculptural Grueby pottery with its leathery glaze. The painting is by plein air artist Henry Ryan MacGinnis (1875-1962). The contemporary purple Phillips chair by Rodolfo Dordoni for Minotti was made in Italy. The adjoining bathroom, with its pod-shaped shower, which Dennis designed with his uncle, sculptor Harold Kimmelman, has views of the secluded garden. For privacy, there are pocket doors, electrically operated shades, and a glass panel from the top of the wall to the ceiling.

THIS PAGE TOP AND BOTTOM:

In the master bedroom, a deer, made by E. Joy Morris Company of Pennsylvania at the turn of the last century, appears to have just come out of the woods, which in the spring is filled with 30,000 daffodils. "Nature is our wallpaper," says Richard. Some of the Arts and Crafts furniture is reproduction, made by Voorhees Craftsmen in California and purchased at the annual Arts and Crafts Conference at The Grove Park Inn in Ashville, North Carolina. The paneling behind the bed creates a wall but does not block the light. The geometric Tiffany lamp, with its row of yellow turtle-back glass, is on a round table marked by Gustav Stickley.

Wynn, the resident Lakeland terrier, has her own Arts and Crafts-style bed in the master bedroom in the new glass wing. The Rookwood vase, decorated by Louise Abel Barrett in 1924, is on a cabinet by Gustav Stickley. The painting of a boy picking berries is by Philadelphia artist Violet Oakley (1874-1961).









In the guest bedroom, oversize cast-iron horse-drawn carriages and fire fighting toys are displayed on recessed glass shelves firmly fixed in place with metal strips attached to a plywood board to give the shelves stability. The toys, made by Hubley, Dent, Ives, and Pratt and Letchworth, circa 1880 to 1910, are in better condition than those Dennis played with as a child. To the right, also on recessed glass shelves, is a collection of brush stroke flow blue ironstone china in the fern pattern, appropriate for Fernside Cottage. Hard to come by, but not expensive, it was made in the mid-nineteenth century by W. H. Quindley & Company in Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire, England, and painted by women and children.

PREVIOUS PAGE:

Paul Kane painted the large op-art painting of yellow crumpled paper for the space over the bed in the guest room of the 1835 part of the house. Another Paul Kane painting, of purple crumpled paper, hangs in the adjacent hallway. These paintings function much like the collections on their invisible glass shelves that function visually as framed works of installation art. On bedside tables is the Hubley cast-iron Overland Circus, a recent purchase. The window sills are filled with an earlier Hubley Royal Circus. "We are just the third owner of this Hubley Royal Circus," says Richard. They were showroom samples kept in storage until a Hubley storeroom supervisor found them. They were acquired at auction by the late Massachusetts collector Don Kaufman. Dennis bought them at Bertoia's first Kaufman sale in March 2009. In all there are eight pieces: wagons, cages, a calliope, and a band wagon.

gardens for them, so I started a landscape business—designing, planting and maintenance."

A love of nature is the theme of the house, bringing the outside in and creating garden-like spaces with skylights, glass walls, exposed field stone, textured surfaces, and the use of plantings inside, such as Ficus trees, some growing two stories high. While renovating the original house, a glass wing was built for the kitchen, allowing light to flood into the house. When an addition was needed, architect Dan White returned to the site. Rather than adding a stone wing to match the old house, Dan and Dennis came up with the idea of a glass cube built into the hillside on top of the garage, with





ABOVE LEFT AND RIGHT:

In a corner of the guest bedroom, an outside row stander and a jester head shield from a carousel made by the Dentzel Company in Philadelphia, circa 1907, are placed next to a Benjamin Ficus tree that has grown two-and-a-half stories to the top of the North East corner of the dining room. The tree's shadow creates a dappling effect on the wall.

The crisp and spare anonymous portrait of an unidentified man is painted on wood and is in its original frame. On the table is one of the rarest pieces of American yellow ware with a Rockingham glaze. This figural inkwell, on an inverted vegetable dish, made at the Harker and Taylor pottery (active 1851-1871) in Liverpool, Ohio, is referred to in the company's records as "William Penn Treating with the Iroquois." Two other examples are pictured in *Harker Pottery from Rockingham and Yellowware to Modern*, by William and Donna Gray (Schiffer, 2006).

FACING PAGE:

In the downstairs study, the scroddled ware penny banks, circa 1840-1850, on the top two shelves, were made by mixing scraps of different colored clays like marbled cake batter. On the center shelves, Pennsylvania redware dogs stand next to Bennington, Vermont, book flasks. Below, some of the English, Ohio, and Bennington hound-handled pitchers with brown Rockingham-type glazes are marked by their makers. A Bennington dog with a basket in his mouth stands on a small Connecticut blanket chest next to the sofa.

the wooded and fern covered sloping terrain serving as blinds; no need for curtains. The copper roof appears to hover over the glass walls and disappear into the landscape.

Dennis believes that in order to appreciate collections they need to be brought together so people can make comparisons and enjoy the material as a group. "If unrelated objects are placed around the house, they cannot be fully understood," says Dennis. Adds Richard,

"Each collection is exhibited on recessed glass shelves set onto a frame to create a single composition. The individual objects work like details of a painting." The installations have colored backgrounds enhanced with warm lighting that simulates sunlight.

Last year, Dennis closed his landscaping business so that he and Richard could travel and pursue their passion for collecting. Recently at the New York Winter Antiques

Show in January they purchased a folk art painting of two children from Arthur Liverant and an ox weathervane from Tillou Gallery. In February they purchased a piece of art pottery at Rago's Auction, and a piece of mocha pottery at dealer H. L. Chalfant's "Unveiling" event. Like gardens, their collections change continuously. **AFN**

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