

# Through the Eyes of an Artist



A modern-day Renaissance woman creates her dream home.

BY REBECCA ITTNER

The tree theme in the living room was inspired by one of Lambert's favorite illustrators. The stained glass in the front window is original to the home.



**I**magine living in a home for three decades and then being told you have to move out—soon. That was the dilemma Georgia Lambert encountered in 2002.

“I had rented the home for 30 years, raised my daughter there, made it my own—well as much as you can with a rental. The woman who owned the house passed away, and her kids chose to sell it right away.” Sometimes, when faced with adversity or sudden change, the proverbial window opens.

“I was in a panic of what to do. That first weekend I was visiting a friend whose parents lived in a neighboring town,” Lambert recalls. “We were early, so we drove around the old neighborhoods. We drove past this house the day after the ‘For Sale’ sign went up.”

So, she went inside the little Queen Anne cottage and fell in love with the space. “I promised this house that I would make it into a little jewel.” After some negotiations—Lambert was able to use


some of her antiques as part of the down payment—the house was hers. “The house closed the same day my grandson was born. It was all absolute perfect timing,” she recalls.

Her home didn’t come without problems, however. The first year, Lambert had the roof replaced and the upstairs balcony redone to bring it up to code. “Other than those really big jobs, I’ve done everything myself,” she says. “The couple who owned it prior to me painted everything white. It took me a year to strip the walls and woodwork—there were eight layers of paint and paper in some places.”

When she was ready to start painting and decorating, Lambert drew on memories of her childhood and her travels around the world. “I always wanted a perfect ‘Grandma house,’ just like my own grandmother’s. She was one of those old Southern belles—her house was a magical place. I remember the holidays there; they were wonderful. I think it’s because of her that I love the patina of old houses.”

**Right:** Though the overmantel is vintage, Lambert made the fireplace from an inexpensive electric model found at Home Depot. She covered the exterior with vintage tiles and created the base with large tile squares.





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**Left:** Lambert hand-painted the ceiling and moldings in the library in true Victorian style.

**Right:** This bunny lives on the wall in the dining room. He is one of many unexpected delights found on the walls throughout the home.



Growing up in a military family, Lambert resided in many different places. “We lived in Europe for years, and living with all that wonderful architecture had a big influence on me. I had a full range of knowing how beautiful this world can be and how horrible things can be.” This rich background, Lambert says, “Influenced my art, my life, my teaching.” Years of art school as well as a lifetime of sewing, painting and learning about anything that interested her gave Lambert a wealth of inspiration and knowledge to draw from. “I am so grateful for my art school training. We learned all of those Renaissance techniques,” she says.

With a home of her own, her inner artist was free to create. “Homes are not just decorated boxes. For me, my home is a canvas. I started with the heart of the home and worked outward,” Lambert says. “The first area I

Painted was the sitting room.” She covered the ceiling with inexpensive, white embossed wallpaper and then hand-painted it to look like aged copper tiles.

All the walls in her home tell a story. “After the wood pillars were striped of paint, they looked like oak trees, so I carried on the theme when I painted the walls in the dining room,” Lambert explains. If you look closely, you’ll discover an owl, a bunny and other delightful details. “I wanted my house to be a place that wherever your eye would land there would be something interesting to look at. So, the longer you are here, the more you discover.”

The living room walls are also painted with a tree theme but are a little more fantastical. “The trees were inspired by the artist Kay Nielsen, an illustrator who was very popular in the early 1900s and whose work is still very collectible,” she says.



**Above:** Lambert painted this exquisite vase with an image that was inspired by Gustav Klimt.

**Opposite:** The dining room and adjacent sitting room were the first areas in the house that Lambert transformed. The rooms are styled in layers—rugs, fabrics and accessories.


The bedroom is a mix of Victorian and Art Nouveau styles. “I found a book of Art Deco art. There was a picture that had a gold tree painted with a kind of Asian movement. When I got this house, I knew I’d have to paint it somewhere,” Lambert says. “You can get inspiration from all sorts of places.” She painted the tree first, then the ceiling and walls. Surprisingly, the dark ceiling is soothing and seems to expand the space. “Though it’s counterintuitive, the dark ceiling actually makes the room seem larger,” she says.

While the hand-painted walls are pure Lambert, many of the details are true to period. “I’ve made it a point to choose vin-

tage or reproduction wallpaper and tile. I even hunted down Lincrusta for the living room. Fortunately, with a house this size, you can afford to use really nice stuff. I used Bradbury & Bradbury and Mason & Wolf wallpapers and borders.”

The draperies were all handmade by Lambert and she also reupholstered some of the furniture—something she hadn’t done much of before. “Don’t be intimidated because you don’t know how to do something,” Lambert says. “That’s what books are for. Books are amazing—you can learn how to do anything.” Her advice? Start with something small. “I didn’t know how to do a lot of these things until I





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Lambert fools the eye by painting the bedroom ceiling darker than the walls. “Your eyes are naturally drawn to lighter colors, making the room seem bigger,” she says. She reupholstered the chair and made the bedspread using vintage fabrics.

needed to do it. The beauty of learning to do things yourself is that you don't have to spend a lot of money to do really neat things. A glue gun and staple gun are two of my favorite tools," she says.

Just like the Victorians, Lambert's unique abode is a combination of styles. The most prominent Victorian aspect is layering. "The Victorians were famous for layering. I think it is the layering that gives a richness that is missing in modern décor," she says. You can see this layering in everything from the colors on her walls to the tapestries and rugs. And it doesn't take a

fortune to decorate in this way. "You don't have to have only expensive furniture and accessories. Combine heirlooms with cheap finds. It's the overall look that matters," Lambert says.

"This house is the perfect size for me, and my grandson loves it," she says. Her journey to homeownership may have been a little unconventional, but it's turned out perfectly. "You can start a home and make it your own when you're 60—you don't have to be 20. And it doesn't all have to be done in a week," she says. "Do a little, sit with it, do a little more. It's sort of a dance you do with a house." ❁

To see more of Georgia Lambert's work,  
visit [falconrose.com](http://falconrose.com).

## DIY Advice

Georgia Lambert shares her renovating and decorating tips.

Stripping was awful. I tried natural products, but they wouldn't touch the eight layers of paint and paper. I did find something that worked: orange gel. You have to keep trying to find what works for you.

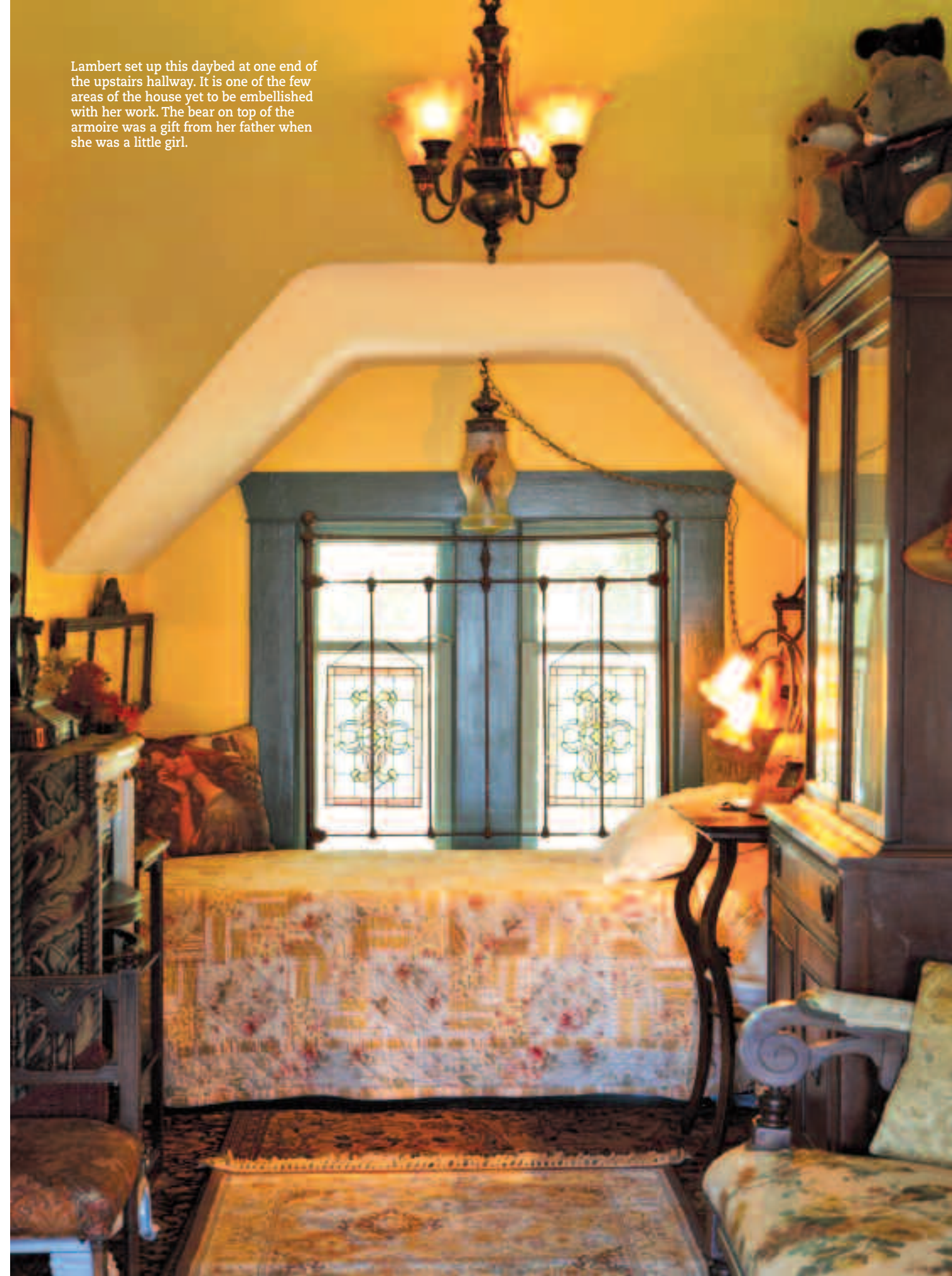
Don't use a heat gun in an old house. A lot of old houses have caught fire from someone using heat paint strippers. They are not really safe for old houses—especially when you get to the oil-based paint layers.

Be creative. The lamp in the dining room originally had a plain white glass shade. I simply painted the inside of the shade with glass paint.

If you want something but can't find it, consider making it yourself. I made the hatpin holder by cutting a Styrofoam ball in half then covering it with fabric and trim using a hot glue gun. Then I glued it on top of a wooden stand.

Use what you have; a house is not a museum. I use all my stuff—my silver, my pewter. It's all livable.

Lambert set up this daybed at one end of the upstairs hallway. It is one of the few areas of the house yet to be embellished with her work. The bear on top of the armoire was a gift from her father when she was a little girl.





**Above:** Lambert filled her home with personal treasures, including this harp, a gift from her harp teacher, and a leather journal.

**Above left:** The medallion in the dining room was made from wood, wallpaper and paint.

**Left:** When new, this was a plain glass shade. Lambert painted it with glass paint to coordinate with the dining room.



**Right:** Vintage finds create a beautiful vignette on the bedroom dresser. Whisky brown and ivory are perfect accents to the blue walls.

**Bottom right:** Lambert has collected hat pins for years. “For many years I was involved with the Renaissance faire and made period costumes to wear. I wore hats and hat pins often,” she says.

**Below:** Details matter—that’s why Lambert painted the light switch to match the theme in her master bedroom.

