

# Coming Home to Shadyside

*"There's something about Pittsburgh people—they never let you go," says Sandy Tarr, who twenty years ago left family, friends, and the rolling hills of her native city to spread her wings as an artist in New York. Last year, her children grown and a nest egg set aside, she decided to come home to the Victorian enclave of Shadyside.*



*When Sandy returned to Pittsburgh, she had her heart set on forging a new career as a house restorer. Her first project was to be this 1890's Eastlake house. Tall and thin with a smattering of decorative trim, its exterior reminded her of a Victorian Christmas card. Inside, French doors flooded the living room with light, a luminous surprise delightful to an artist. Still, Sandy bought the house with the intention of renovating it for resale.*



*But as she began replacing moldings and polishing floors, she realized "this house was meant for me." Its rooms were so perfectly scaled that when her furniture arrived, everything fit almost exactly where she told the movers to place it. All her possessions—the ladder-back chair she had bought for a song and refinished, the pastel-hued canvases she had painted, her white sofas pillowed with old fabrics—seemed "to be coming home—like me," she says.*

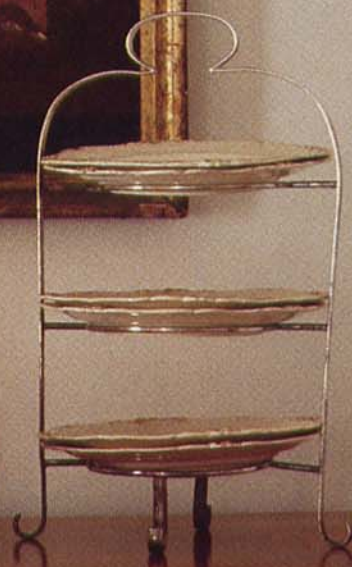
PHOTOGRAPHS WILLIAM P. STEELE

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*When it comes to renovating a house, Sandy's artistic predilections are clear: Her first priority is light—and making every room as airy as possible. But the dining room shown here presented a real challenge. Wedged between the kitchen and living room, it had only one window, which faced a brick wall. To keep the room from being doomed to darkness, Sandy widened both doorways and topped them with transom windows—an architectural device that preserves coziness while allowing an abundance of light. "I love a house with vistas from one room to the next," she remarks.*





Anyone invited for dinner at Sandy's would immediately understand her openhearted approach to living. "Glasses go right on the table. I don't like to hide the gleam of old wood with a tablecloth, and I don't worry about which rings are new and which date from a hundred years ago!" In Sandy's view, antiques—and indeed all possessions—should be used and enjoyed. Silver is set out and the candles in the contemporary Scandinavian glass chandelier lit every



night, even when she is dining alone.

"I buy china and furniture as an artist, not as a collector. Lines and color—that is what really matters to me," explains Sandy, who mixes not only the plain with the fancy but the old with the new. Her painted dining chairs, for example, were purchased at Macy's years ago, while her rush-seated Rhode Island desk chair is a fine antique. Ivy-rimmed lusterware plates are by Davenport; the pearl-handled knives are Victorian.



At first glance a visitor might think Sandy had merely spruced up this fireplace-warmed kitchen with a fresh coat of sparkling white paint—which is exactly the illusion she had in mind. In fact, the kitchen, formerly sleek and contemporary, was the room most extensively redone in the house. Cabinets, distinguished by Georgian molding, were custom made to Sandy's specifications. A new classical mantel was added to the fireplace, and the room was filled with mellow-toned antique pine—a scrubbed table, an old Welsh dresser topped with a collection of white enamelware, and a tall cupboard that Sandy refinished herself.





When Sandy finished the renovation, she decided she deserved a “reward for all the months spent with plaster in my hair” and purchased a secretary, above, “that organizes all my bill-paying.” Its doors—the only mirrored surface in her bedroom—cleverly eliminate the need for a mirror over a dresser.

Since Sandy has an extensive collection of colorful quilts and likes to change them all the time, she only uses white linens on her bed as a backdrop. Her walls and even most of her upholstered furniture are white for a similar reason. “I’m restless when it comes to color, and I love rearranging my rooms,” she says. “Though I haven’t lived here long enough to be bored yet, I’m notorious



for putting furniture on a blanket and dragging it around when I can’t wait for a friend to help.”

One piece of furniture Sandy admits she will never move is the heavy marble-topped table in her third-floor art studio, a place where she surrounds herself with her favorite things. Here a quilt curtains the new wall of windows, a scrap screen fills a corner, and the lacy iron table displays samples of the vintage fabrics collected during the two decades she worked as a textile designer. Though Sandy still loves designing fabric patterns, moving to Pittsburgh has enabled her to devote herself to fine art and what she calls a unique brand of sculpture—renovating houses and filling them with light, color, and drama.