



(above, left) The Villas in progress of bazardous material removal. Tarps are unsightly but are part of the lead and mold remediation process. Sara chose to have the buildings remediated at different times so she can work in each building as it's finished.

Id buildings are full of surprises.

Oftentimes, those surprises aren't of the fun variety. These can include everything from foundation problems and environmental hazards to pests that have taken up residence, and, in the case of our Minden, Louisa Project House, a spring welling up into

When it comes to these unfortunate surprises, owner and blogger Sara McDaniel of Simply Southern Cottage says, "They are inevitable when working with historic structures. I hope for the best but always plan for the worse." Luckily, Sara is no stranger to the unexpected. As someone who's life radically shifted after leaving an established career and moving back home to Louisiana, she's faced her own share of surprises and allowed them to strengthen her.

That mentality translates well into rehabbing the old buildings of the Villas at Spanish Court. Though termites, surprise springs and walls ridden with asbestos try to stymie her, she's prepared and ready to work with the process, not against it.



(above, right) Remediation of lead paint and mold takes about one week. The process begins with experts measuring the levels of the toxic bazards. Over the course of the week, they set up, remediate the bazards and clean up. "Then comes the final reporting to ensure the Villas have a clean hill of health." Sara says.







(above, left) Sara's home is full of soul and has a collected, dynamic feeling, "When you get a sign from a hig hox store, five thousand other people across the nation will also have it,"

Sara says. "But when you shop from antiques shops and garage sales, you'll find special items that you alone will have." For example, these theater chairs, which she found at an antiques market, are from an old theater in Michigan and are the sort of one-of-a-kind pieces Sara loves. She'll use this same mentality when decorating the Villas.

(above, right) When Sara first ventured into interior design, neutral farmhouse style was a big trend. "I leaned into it," Sara says. Then a friend brought over some chairs to Sara's home for a photoshoot. "They were so joyfut," Sara says. "I immediately thought, "I have to bring color into my home!"

STAYING (o)

Louisiana's climate is its own main character with heat and humidity.

But guests of the hotel will find nothing but perfect temperatures, thanks to
mini-split AC units from MRCOOL, a Kentucky-based air conditioning company.



PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF MECOOL

- CLIMATE CONTROL. The MRCOOL team are experts
 on climate, and know which type of unit will work for
 local weather patterns. "Louisiana is a warmer area. Air
 conditioning is a necessary respite from hot weather that
 can sometimes be dangerous to spend too much time in,"
 says the MR COOL team. "Our units also remove humidity
 from the air as it cools, ensuring you're comfortable as well
 as safe."
- MINI SPLIT UNITS. Central AC units have air handles that push air into rooms through a vent. But the MRCOOL team suggested mini-split AC units for the Villas, which allow homeowners to choose precisely where their air handler goes. 'In the case of the Villas, it will allow each separate Villa to have its own temperature control," the team says.
- DIY FRIENDLY. Most AC units require professional installation, but MRCOOL has an option for those who want to DIY their air conditioning. "We came onto the scene with a product that was almost unthinkable," the team says. "It's called the DIY and it allows homeowners to take control of their own system's installation."



(above) Believe it or not, Sara got all the pieces in her gallery wall for under \$100 at a store that was having a massive sale on art. "After lying them out on the floor, I just got my hammer and nails and went for it," she says. "And it turned out so dare cute!" The Villas will have a mix between farm cottage style and other farmbouse-friendly styles.

(below) A variety of thrifted pieces adorn Sara's mantel, including \$7 artwork and a rustic wooden box that she got from a garage sale. She also added in some books and topiaries for additional texture and interest. "You'll notice the whole tableau is kind of off-centered. I love asymmetry. It gives a sense of surprise," she says.

EXPECTATIONS VERSUS REALITY

Sara is extremely organized while juggling several areas of entrepreneurship at once, from filming an HGTV show to overseeing the Villas' renovations. Her organization and firm control of her projects lets her adapt, no matter the circumstance. "My organization is the scaffolding for when things go awry," Sara says. "And something always will, especially with delays."

For example, Sara learned that the Villas would be inaccessible to her as their environmental hazards were remedied. So she prepared for the delay and figured out ways around the closures. "I had the buildings closed off one at a time," she says. "That way, I was able to work on the open ones. When the first building was closed off, I took measurements prior to the remediation and had contractors also come and take measurements of the floors, windows and cabinet spaces." Thanks to her planning the project has moved forward, even when no one could set foot inside.



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Safe and SECURE

Once the Villas at Spanish Court reemerge from their renovation cocoon, the premises will be secured by Eufy, a company that offers the latest in smart technology for homes and businesses.

- · SMART HOMES. We've all experienced the integration of our lives with technology. Eufy has a variety of smart home systems, from robo vacuums to baby and pet monitors. What Sara will use at the Villas is their security systems, which use modern technology to turn devices into command centers for safety. This includes security systems and alarms Sara can control from her phone, as well as smart locks that guests will be able to use to get in and out of their Villa.
- . EASY TO USE, Eufy's motto is "Smart Home Simplified," and they've created easy-to-use smart home devices and appliances. Wireless home security systems are one of their premiere offerings. This plays out in practical ways; for example, the smart locks each have a fingerprint entry system, and Sara will be able to reset the code combination from her phone when new quests stay at the Villas.
- . UNOBTRUSIVE. Sara is excited to work with Eufy because the security system will be unobtrusive, yet effective. The charm of the Villas will stay unmarred by any heavy or ugly cameras. Instead, Eufy's system is discreet, allowing guest to focus on fun and relaxation, while giving Sara the peace of mind that her property will remain safe.



During the process of hazardous material remediation, the contractors place tarps over every door and window to make sure the toxic asbestos and lead particles stay inside the building and don't leak into the outside air. Even though the Villas are still in their decrepit state, locals and tourists alike drive by to see the activity and track the progress. "Everyone is excited, and that excitement is contagious," Sara says. "We can't wait to throw open the doors and welcome everyone in."

LESSONS, NOT LOSSES

Each unexpected surprise is a learning process, and Sara's experience teaches her where to find answers. She's never dealt with a spring welling up through the ground before, so when water made an appearance where it had no business to be, she knew just where to turn. "I go straight to experts," she says, "I have a good team I use for each project. My team has invested in me, and I've invested in them and that's gotten me through so many difficulties." She highly recommends finding the right people to work with, in every area of life. Her plumber ended up putting a pipe on the spring to catch the water and drain it to the nearby creek, saving the Villas from a watery grave.

By staying organized and treating each surprise as a learning opportunity, Sara artfully navigates an inherently daunting project. "Everything happens for a reason," she says. "So I trust in the beauty of every circumstance."

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Kenovation RESOURCES

An old house rescue needs just as many building materials as a new house. Here are some of our sponsors and what they can contribute to Project House Minden.



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