

NASHVILLE LIFESTYLES

AT HOME

FALL/WINTER 2016

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Little Big Town's
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Musicians'
Studios



HOME SWEET *Home*

A Little Big Town musician and his wife team up with a local interior designer to craft their dream house on the outskirts of Franklin.

BY KRISTIN LUNA. PHOTOS BY SHANNON FONTAINE





Dining room: The dining room is often used to host Phillip and Rebecca Sweet's large families, like last Thanksgiving when they had 20 people over for dinner. "It's a great room because you can really feel the whole house in that spot," Phillip says. "You enjoy the front part of the home but you can see into the kitchen. A lot of houses have these big open floor plans, but I really like how this house is sectioned off." **Great room:** One of Phillip's favorite things to do in the morning is retreat to the great room to play around on the real ivory keys of the dark brown piano designer Brad Ramsey found through Nashville Piano Rescue. "Brad emailed me a list of pianos, and he was going to get it for his house, and I was like, 'Sorry, Brad!'" Rebecca says. "It's from the '40s, alligator is what they were calling it. It was up on its side in the Northeast. A piano teacher passed away, and none of her kids wanted it so he saved it." The Sweets didn't even have to refurbish the old beauty, just polish, tune it, and add a little Amish wood milk.

Little Big Town may be out on the road touring more often than not, but when it came to creating a Tennessee refuge, singer and guitarist Phillip Sweet and his wife Rebecca desired a home with space for entertaining, relaxing, and—most importantly—making music that they could settle into for the long term.

Though the band has been active since the late '90s, their breakthrough didn't happen until 2005 when "Boondocks" became their first top 10 hit on Billboard's Hot Country Songs chart. The Sweets continued to live in a cozy condo in Germantown until 2008 when they traded their Werthan Loft unit for a 3,500-square-foot house in Nolensville. At the time, the band had no record label and was in the process of changing managers, but Phillip and Rebecca had a newborn daughter and they wanted to get into Williamson County for the schools sooner rather than later.

"I knew about Nolensville from growing up here [in Brentwood], and back then, we could get a new house there without paying an arm and a leg," Rebecca says.

Phillip adds, "It was a semicustom home where they had a plan but you could pick out everything on your own. I liked that little house in Catalina. We built it from ground up."

But eventually, five years later, it was time to move on. None of their lives—their daughter Penelopi's school, their jobs, Rebecca's Brentwood-based family—were in Nolensville, rather "we were just over there because we wanted to be," Phillip says. After looking for land for a year and a half and not finding anything that was a good fit for their taste and budget, they wandered into their now home in Franklin.

At first, the Sweets—who looked at dozens of houses and have, what Rebecca jokes, "a bit of a real estate addiction"—didn't consider the large house. But when they saw the spacious back lawn on nearly two acres, awash in foliage with a rectangular pool as the centerpiece, they knew they'd found their place. They relocated in November 2013 and got to work sculpting it into the home of their dreams. There's even a lake out back where Phillip can fish.

"It was hard to find the [right] size of land with privacy at the price we wanted," Rebecca says. "We weren't even considering buying this house but [from the time] we walked into it until we stepped onto the back patio, we were like, 'this is it.' It has so much potential."

While 7,700 square feet is a good amount of



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space for a family of three to fill, there's rarely a time when the Sweets don't have people over, whether the band and their families, other musicians who co-write with Phillip, or any of a number of their management team. There's often a gaggle of kids running around, too, as Rebecca and Phillip both have several siblings and a total of 10 nieces and nephews ranging in age from 1 to 23. Not to mention, Penelopi, who turns seven this winter, has regular play dates with her dad's bandmates' children—they even have their own band they call Little Big Kids.

So having areas adaptable for entertaining was important to the social couple. Even though the house, built in 2002, is not yet 15 years old, many of the features like the telephone system were out-of-date, so they slowly started to upgrade everything, little by little. But when it came to the overall interior design of the home, they went straight to the professional: Brad Ramsey of Brad Ramsey Interiors.

"We told Brad we don't want an 'insta-house' and move in instantly having everything done and furnished," Phillip says of what he calls a collaborative design effort with Ramsey. "We like to collect art, we like to pick things up from

our travels and our experiences and incorporate that into our home. Brad did all of that—he took all our little pieces and found places for them, connected them for us."

One such revered accent they found in Portland, Ore. is a massive piece of driftwood that a local artist carved figurines into.

"That thing rode in the back of the bus for a long time," Rebecca says, adding that the band loves to go scouting for new bits of home décor while on tour. "It's fun and easy because all of us [the band and spouses] like to go shopping. Kimberly found this gorgeous window that's in Daisy's room, Karen finds all her fabulous turquoise pieces out on the road, and we bring home large pieces of furniture!"

With a few pieces already to start with—and a whole lot of shopping to do—Ramsey got to work, beginning with the music room upon Rebecca's insistence.

"Poor Phillip never really got a music room because we got married and had a baby soon after, so his writing room turned into a nursery because we only had so much space," she says. "When we came here, I told Brad, 'Phillip has to have his own room. I don't care if the rest of >>>



Above: The Sweets spend many nights unwinding in the whiskey room, where this is an old-fashioned record player, no distraction of a TV, and plenty of different kinds of whiskey on tap for sipping. **Below left:** Ramsey says that Phillip is a firm believer in cultivating the energy of each room, and so he incorporated the singer's collection of gemstones throughout the home. **Below right:** Rebecca found the vintage coat rack while she was out antique hunting, which wound up being a perfect fit for the entryway, which had no closet or storage space.



the house isn't done, we've got to focus on this room."

For his retreat, Phillip desired an open space where he could showcase accomplishments, like Grammys and other awards, and leave out a bevy of musical instruments to "set up and jam" when the urge strikes—but that was also without clutter. Ramsey says the size of the room allowed him to fulfill those wishes, as well as install plenty of seating. It serves a dual purpose, too, as the family uses it for movie nights and Mario Kart competitions, thanks to the 70-inch TV, and Penelopi takes any opportunity to use the room as her stage (her current go-to is Sheppard's "Geronimo").

"We've got to have some room for some dancing!" Phillip says. "It's really nice to have a space where I can just go and create anytime I want. I've written a lot more since it's happened, too, because I can go focus on it and be immersed in music. And any instrument I want to pick up and try to play, I can do it, which I never really had before. It's not like a studio in there. It's just a room where I can make sounds and record work tapes and stuff."

The musical theme doesn't end in Phillip's writing lair. Ramsey framed six pages of an old classical piece to set the tone in the great room, and while the song he chose was based purely on artistic merit, Phillip says the message couldn't have been more apropos.

"It's kind of cool what it says—it says it's the bard and it's in four voices, and I'm in a band with four voices," Phillip says. "Even the lyrics are fitting, because it's about persevering the test of the storm. That's exactly our story."

Phillip spends many mornings in the great room playing around on the piano because he loves to hear the melodic echo, which he calls "inspiring," generated by the tall ceilings. His daughter has already shown a knack for the instrument, too, and having a piano in the central area of the house has proven to be the catalyst for plenty of father-daughter bonding.

The room is also outfitted with a big painting by Marilyn Johnson, which Rebecca jokingly calls "our first real piece of art" and was gifted to the Sweets by her uncle.

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The edge Phillip refers to can be experienced in the front whiskey room, which Rebecca says originally was intended to be an office.

"There's a record player, and it's fun at the end of the day to go in there and curl up in those big chairs, throw a record on," Rebecca says. "There's not a TV in there, so you don't get sucked into that world."

Phillip adds that it was important to have rooms where the sole purpose is each other's company, though they also use their love of whiskey as a conduit to conduct meetings. "That is the office, man," he says. "It's where all the good business happens!"

Thanks to Ramsey's guidance, the bulk of the main level renovations—including the couple's master suite—are now complete, though eventually the rest of the home will be given the same care. Currently, the basement is in a state of transition after flooding earlier this year, so the Sweets had no choice but to tackle it next. The

ultimate goal is to provide a more comfortable space for their large extended families to gather, with a rec room for the kids and a bar for the adults (OK, and maybe a wine cellar, too).

"We pulled out the wall of the basement, and there was exposed brick behind it," Phillip says. "I was like, 'yeah!'"

Rebecca adds, "We always have this thing about exposed brick because our first place in Werthan was all exposed brick, so it's kind of nostalgic. At our old house in Nolensville, we put in a brick backsplash."

Though the couple may eventually invest in a second home if the timing is right, Rebecca says this is where her family will live forever.

"We're always talking about having a lake house eventually," she says, "but for Nashville, this is it for us."



Writing room: Recently, Rebecca surprised Phillip for his birthday with a cover for his digital keyboard. "It didn't have a case or a stand for it that really looked good, so she had my two guitar techs design, build, and deliver it over to the house," Phillip recalls. "It looks really, really beautiful." **Quirky collectibles:** Both the Sweets love to shop for quirky pieces, works of art, and other things that might fit in their home while on the road. One such piece they brought back from tour was a large Crown barrel. "We stuck it in the bottom of the bay of the bus in Texas," Phillip recalls. "A rep down there told our manager, 'hey I've got a Crown barrel if you want it,' and we said, 'put it in the bus.' So we rolled it off the bus and into the house!"