

SARAH'S HOUSE



“Sarah's House”

After Aaron Friedman finished Jenifer's House, his wife, Sarah, asked him to make a house for her. She expressed her preference for a Southern colonial antebellum style mansion similar to “Tara” in *Gone with the Wind*, “with six columns.” Friedman said, “I thought that was a pretty good idea, because in each one of the houses . . . I wanted to build something that was architecturally different than the other ones.” So, he happily responded by building “Sarah's House.”

Friedman went through a lengthy process before he arrived at the ultimate design and layout for Sarah's House. “I was getting ready to build the house,” he said, “but [I realized] that I wasn't sure what I wanted, so [I decided to] build a 1/8” scale model so I can get a better idea of what it looks like as opposed to just drawing a picture or making plans on a piece of paper.” Friedman's first model was a two story house with columns in front, but he decided it looked more like a formal government building than a home. He built a second model that he liked better, but it still didn't look quite right to him. So, he decided to do more research and look at more pictures of Southern colonial style houses.

After extensive research, Friedman found pictures of D'Evereaux, a Mississippi planter's town house built in the Greek Revival style in Natchez. “I fell in love with the look of the house,” he said, but it still wasn't large enough to show as many rooms on the interior as he wanted to show. He decided to add wings on either side of the house, which both created the grander façade that he was seeking as well as space for all of the rooms he wanted to include in the house.

Friedman made another 1/8” model with a one-story wing on either side of the two-story central section. This model included columns and a front porch, but Friedman realized that the rooflines didn't look right. So, he made yet another 1/8” model “that had everything I wanted,” he said. “It had the look of the D'Evereaux house, it had the wings, but this time the roof line is the same height as the original roof. I left the back of the house open so all the rooms could be viewed.”

The finished miniature house features two floors of living area, an attic space, and a “widow's walk”¹ at the very top of the roof. Friedman noted that he added two dormers to the roof on the front side of the house, which is another departure from the actual D'Evereaux house. Two tall brick chimneys tower above the roof.

The exterior of Sarah's House features six stately fluted columns in front (as requested by Sarah) and another four in the rear, all accented with Corinthian capitals. Friedman said that he purchased the last 10 capitals that the manufacturer had available, but that was just the number that he needed. He also made the bases for the columns. The house is landscaped with blooming flowers in planter beds adjacent to the structure and magnolia trees in the yard.

The exterior is clad in wood clapboard siding made to 1/12th scale and painted bright white. A total of 20 working windows and two picture windows are set off by wood shutters that Friedman painted dark green.

Friedman pointed out the tiny shutter holdbacks and explained that on an actual house these were used to keep the shutters open during fair weather or to hold them closed to protect against a storm.



Aaron Friedman places a chair in the attic of "Sarah's House." Photo courtesy of Alabama Department of Archives and History. Donated by Alabama Media Group. Photo by Aaron O. Tesney, *Mobile Press-Register*.

Friedman topped Sarah's House with rust-colored asphaltic shingles that are made to precise scale size and thickness. As quoted by *Mobile Press-Register* reporter Betty Jo Lagman, Friedman said "It took 60 hours of work just to put on the shingles."² Copper roof valleys complete the roof and make it "leak proof," he said with a smile. Detailed molding around the edge of the eaves adds an authentic decorative touch to the exterior.



View showing wrought iron work in front of house.

According to the *Press-Register*, Friedman pointed out the brick foundation piers and front steps of the house and noted that "each brick was set one at a time," with mortar spread in the gaps between bricks. The oven baked bricks, he said, are exact scale replicas of actual brick.³ Friedman added lattice work, painted dark green to match the shutters, between the foundation piers.

The flooring on the front porch is mahogany. Two white lion figures guard the front entrance. Wicker porch furniture and flower stands are arranged for leisurely sitting, and a pitcher of lemonade is set on the wicker table, ready to provide refreshments to hot and thirsty visitors.

Friedman noted that he hand made the fan light windows above the front door and the door leading out to the second floor balcony above the front entry. A black wrought iron chandelier

hangs from the ceiling above the front porch, and a matching wrought iron railing encloses the balcony. Friedman special ordered the wrought iron work from famed miniaturist Chet Spacher. A Southern belle greets visitors from the second floor balcony.

The house is furnished as if several generations have resided there. Most of the furniture is in the Georgian and Victorian styles. Many of the rooms are lit by a chandelier with Austrian crystals and 23 karat gold plating.

The floors in most of the rooms are hand-laid parquet with geometric patterns designed and installed by Friedman from walnut, birch, mahogany, and oak veneers. As quoted in the *Press-Register*, Friedman noted that “Each pattern is different,” adding that the hundreds of tiny pieces were cut by hand and glued down one at a time.⁴ Friedman also observed that a house from this era would not have had central heat, so each room is heated by either a fireplace or a wood or coal stove.

Inside the front door is an entry area with an unusual grandfather clock, mirrored hat and coat rack, and umbrella stand arranged atop black and white marble flooring. This area also includes a porcelain fern stand and figurines, as well as a mirror on the wall that allows visitors to check their appearance as they arrive.



View of the spiral staircase.

Inside the entry foyer, another porcelain Southern belle doll that Friedman called “Scarlet” greets visitors at the base of an unsupported spiral staircase that leads upstairs all the way to the attic and widow’s walk at the top of the house. This dramatic staircase is the most spectacular feature of Sarah’s House and serves as the focal point in the center of the house. Friedman said the staircase was the most difficult challenge he encountered in building this house and any of his other miniature houses.

As Friedman explained to Lagman for the *Press-Register* article, “I made the staircase first,” noting that “it took three or four months to make.”⁵ The challenge was finding the right material that would hold its shape for the curved and twisted banister, without springing back or twisting out of shape. “The [handrails for the] banisters were so difficult to [twist into shape] and they were under such strain that it would collapse on me every time,” he said. After trying several different materials, all of which failed, Friedman ultimately used coaxial television cable⁶. Even then he “twisted and turned it many times before it was exactly right.” Once he succeeding in getting the cable to hold its shape, Friedman painted it to look like stained and polished wood. “I don’t think I’d ever try to build another spiral

staircase of this type in any of my future dollhouses,” Friedman said, “because of all the trouble that I had in building [this one.]”

Sliding paneled pocket doors that actually retract into the walls lead from the entry foyer into the double parlor consisting of a living area and a music room. Friedman handmade the fan light above the pocket doors.

For the living area, Sarah Friedman needlepointed the rug and throw pillows to coordinate with the colors and patterns found in the framed fabric tapestry panels hanging on the walls. The room is furnished with a cream-colored velvet Victorian loveseat and wing chairs made and signed by the miniature artisans known as “Leonetta” (Leon and Etta Scott). These pieces also reflect the colors of the rug and wall panels. An unusual foot stool known as a “gout bench” is positioned in front of one of the wing chairs. Drapes and valences made by family friend Pearl Brook continue to carry out the color theme in this room. A framed portrait of Sarah, which is actually a tiny photograph of the portrait by Mobile artist Carleton W. Furbush⁷ that hung in the Friedmans’ home in Mobile, hangs over the marble fireplace mantle. A silver tea service sits on a low table in front of the fireplace.

An arched wall supported by two beautiful fluted columns separates the music room from the living area. The music room features an upright pump organ and a harp signed by famed miniaturist George Becker.

Another arched entry leads from the parlor into the library and reading room, which Friedman told the *Press-Register* was his “pride and joy.”⁸ This room features walnut paneling, indirectly lighted walnut bookcases holding bound volumes and knick knacks, matchstick



Music Room

window blinds, and a chandelier hanging from the ceiling. The Friedman family crest hangs over the glowing fireplace, which is surrounded by an elaborate walnut mantelpiece. The floor of the library is an intricate parquet inlay pattern made of tiny walnut, birch and maple veneers.

A game table with miniature chess set awaits players as they enter the library. A writing desk with quill, ink, and books is positioned at one window, and a globe of the world stands in a back corner. The red leather



View of Parlor, with Music Room behind.

wing chair in the other back corner is signed and numbered “1” by the artist A. L. Summerlot. An old fashioned smoking stand and a brass spittoon are placed beside the wing chair, and magazines have been left on the seat of the chair. As Friedman said to Lagman with the *Press-Register*, “Everything in this room is handmade. I’d just like to get in and live there.”⁹



Library

Another arched passage on the other side of the entry foyer leads into the dining room, which is furnished in heavy mahogany Queen Anne style furniture. A crystal punch bowl set is in place on the dining table. Damask wallpaper in the dining room is overlaid with solid colored panels, with a chair rail and smaller panels below. The colors of the needlepoint rug made by Sarah Friedman and the draperies made by Pearl Brook complement the deep maroon shade of the upholstered seats of the dining chairs. Pearl also hand made the floral arrangement that sits atop the dining table.



Dining Room

The dining room also features a marble mantle surrounding the fireplace, with gold-plated light sconces on the wall above the mantle. A crystal chandelier hangs from the dining room ceiling, and silver candelabras enhance the overall elegance of the room. A tilt top table is placed in the corner. The final detail is a bell pull hanging on the wall next to the fireplace. This was needlepointed by Sarah in colors that coordinate with the rug, wall coverings, and drapes in this room.



Kitchen

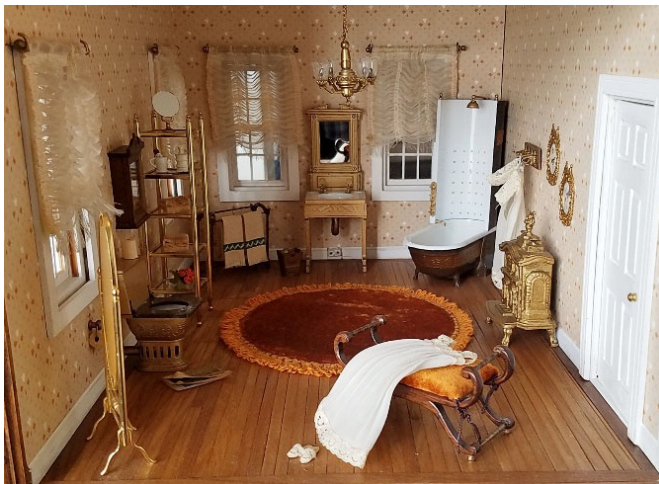
A doorway leads from the dining room into the kitchen, which reflects the authenticity of the antebellum period with an ornate, gleaming cast iron stove, a hand pump at the sink, butter churn beside the sink, and old fashioned ice box (before electric refrigeration) in the back corner. Polished copper pots sit on the stove. The kitchen floor is made of golden oak, with mitered corners.

High backed chairs surround the kitchen table. A lace tablecloth covers the table and a bowl of fresh fruit serves as the centerpiece. A simple country chandelier hangs above the kitchen table. Café curtains with black and green trim made by Pearl Brook cover the lower half of each of the kitchen windows. The kitchen also features a wooden pie cabinet, and ceramic canisters for flour, sugar, coffee, and tea are placed atop the wood hutch. A spoon rack and a traditional “God Bless Our Home” wall hanging that was needlepointed by Sarah Friedman decorate the walls.

The spiral staircase leads from the entry foyer to the second floor landing and hallway. This landing leads out to the balcony above the front door of the house. Doorways also lead from the landing to bedrooms on either side of the second floor.



Above: Master Bedroom. Below: Master Bathroom



white negligee and slippers that are laid out on a bench, ready for the lady of the house to don before retiring for the night.

Miniaturist Rosemary Tucker created the tester bed with canopy in the master bedroom, which is typical of the era. The bed features a rose colored coverlet. Sarah Friedman needlepointed two oval rugs for the master bedroom, which are coordinated with the colors in the tiny floral design of the wallpaper. A standing frame holds another needlepoint work in process, and an old-fashioned bonnet has been placed on the small dresser beside the door. A white painted mantle surrounds the fireplace opposite the bed. An unusual hand painted porcelain “sitz” bathtub waits in the back corner of the room.

The master bathroom is equipped with a cast iron wood stove, cast iron claw foot tub and shower, cast iron sink, and cast iron toilet. A newspaper lies where it was casually left on the floor beside the toilet. Pearl Brook made the Austrian-style drapes on the windows in this room, the robe hanging on the wall next to the tub, and the

A second bedroom on the opposite side of the second floor landing has light colored parquet flooring that Friedman cut and glued in one piece at a time. The light maple finished headboard, mirrored armoire, secretary desk and chair, and other furniture in this room stand in contrast with the dark finished furnishings seen in most of the other rooms. This room is decorated in a yellow and green floral wallpaper, with contrasting white lace curtains and coral-colored drapes. A chaise lounge with matching coral upholstery in the rear of the room is available for afternoon rests. Sarah Friedman made the needlepoint rug and matching pillows for the bed, which features a lace spread. A porcelain water pitcher and wash basin are placed on a bedside table, with needlepointed “his and her” towels hanging on the wall behind.



Second Bedroom



Third Bedroom

A third bedroom on the second floor is decorated with pink wallpaper, pink lace curtains, and a pink bedspread, all of which are set off by a plush green rug. Friedman told the *Press-Register*, “I made the little vanity table, and Pearl (Brook) made the skirt for it.”¹⁰ A bench is in front of the vanity table and a makeup mirror hangs on the wall above. Mrs. Brook also made the red nightgown that lies on the bed, the tiny red slippers on the floor beside the bed, and a frilly hat hanging in one corner of the bedroom.

From the second floor landing, the spiral staircase leads up to the attic, which is furnished with casual wicker furniture. From there, a wrought iron spiral staircase leads to the widow’s walk at the very top of the roof. This area includes a spyglass telescope and ship’s wheel memento.

Friedman told Lagman with the *Press-Register* that he and Sarah “shopped a year for the furnishings” while he was building the house. “It took 14 months to complete this house,” he said, noting that he worked on the project “off and on.”¹¹

*Information compiled by Jere Friedman. All photos by Jere Friedman unless otherwise noted.
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Sources:

- Video of Aaron Friedman describing Sarah’s House
- Lagman, Betty Jo. “A Southern mansion for grandma.” *The Mobile Press Register* 2 May, 1982: F-6. Print.
- Fields, Mary Durland. “Southern House Tour.” *Nutshell News* Dec. 1992: 36-41. Print.

Endnotes:

¹ “A widow's walk, also known as a widow's watch or roofwalk, is a railed rooftop platform often with a small enclosed cupola frequently found on 19th-century North American coastal houses. The name is said to come from the wives of mariners, who would watch for their spouses' return, often in vain as the ocean took the lives of the mariners, leaving the women widows. In other coastal communities, the platforms were called Captain's Walk, as they topped the homes of the more successful captains; supposedly, ship owners and captains would use them to search the horizon for ships due in port.” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Widow%27s_walk

² Lagman, Betty Jo. “A Southern mansion for grandma.” *Mobile Press Register* 2 May, 1982: F-6. Print.

³ *ibid.*

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ The same type of cable commonly used to connect a television set to an antenna or cable television signal.

⁷ Carleton W. Furbush (1895-1966) was a Mobile artist and very active in the Mobile Art Association. He was especially known for formal portraits of local women.

⁸ Lagman, *op. cit.*

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ *ibid.*

Additional photos of Sarah’s House:



Back view of Sarah's House showing the spiral staircase



Lemonade is served on the front porch



Southern Belle waving from upstairs balcony



Detail of Corinthian Capital



Wicker furniture in attic



Wicker furniture on front porch



Front Entry



Dining Room



Detail of Music Room: harp signed by George Becker



Kitchen



Detail of Second Bedroom



Detail of Third Bedroom



Master Bedroom



**Master Bedroom Detail:
Bonnet on dresser**



Second floor landing



**Library detail: red leather wing chair
signed by A. L. Summerlot**