

THIS IS THE ROOM WHERE JON MEACHAM MAKES HISTORY

In the esteemed historian's private office and library, he can keep things just as cluttered as he likes.

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Custom busts top the bookshelves, while the side walls are lined with original posters from both Democratic and Republican presidential campaigns. On the far wall, a portrait of Congressman John Lewis (right) by Michael Shane Neal hangs above a portrait of President George H.W. Bush painted by President George W. Bush. The I Am a Man poster is a copy from the 1968 sanitation workers' strike in Memphis.

It started with the presidential busts. My wife, Keith, and I have long disagreed about the aesthetic value of my collection of noble heads of our former leaders, purchased at minimal cost to me (and to her), at presidential-library gift shops. So when I walked into my study one afternoon to find my busts hidden in a cabinet, I knew it was only a matter of time before Keith would fully take over the one space in our house that belongs to me.

Eight years ago, as we packed up the 2,000-square-foot

apartment in New York City we shared with our three children, Keith painted a halcyon picture of our new life in Nashville. There, we would have a proper house. The Georgian Revival, built in 1929, had a capacious floor plan that would allow for a guest room, a bedroom for each of the children, a family kitchen, a mudroom, and—most alluring—a private library at the far end of the house. I would work undisturbed, surrounded by my books and my collection of campaign posters, busts, and beloved political ephemera.



A 19th-century library trolley from 1stdibs sits below a desk from Gerald Bland. A poster from President Gerald Ford's 1976 campaign is surrounded by black-and-white photographs by David Hume Kennerly, who was the presidential photographer during the Ford administration.



Jon and Keith Meacham with their springer spaniel, Ellie. The daybed is covered in a fabric by Michael S. Smith and topped with pillows covered in fabrics by Bennison and Lisa Fine Textiles. The armchair is upholstered in a fabric by Bennison, and the framed photographs on the wall are from Meacham's collection of Democratic and Republican campaign posters and political memorabilia.



A vintage toleware lamp from Chairish and a collection of presidential busts sit atop a side table.



On the porch of the carriage house, the handmade Pennsylvania Amish rocking chair is next to a tray from Reed Smythe & Company. The lantern is by Jamb.

As soon as we moved into the new house, the meddling began. Wouldn't the books be better organized if alphabetized by author? Couldn't I sort through the boxes of letters and photographs and file them out of sight? Did I really want to hang that life-size poster of Gerald Ford in public view?

I lost the battle before it even began. Every time my wife hosted a party, I was sent to my study to tidy up piles and clear surfaces so that guests could rest their glasses and handbags on side tables without the bother of my clutter.

Sensing marital discord, our brilliant architect, Ridley Wills, together with our equally brilliant decorators, Brockschmidt & Coleman, suggested we consider renovating the old carriage house that was nestled in a grove of trees just below the main house and had not been touched since the 1930s, when the previous owners realized they could no longer afford a chauffeur.

It was the perfect solution.

After a small renovation that involved knocking out the ceiling to reveal existing vaulting and give the room height, and the addition of six banks of bookshelves organized into stacks, I finally had a room of my own (my apologies to Virginia Woolf).

Keith was invited in briefly, along with Bill Brockschmidt and Courtney Coleman, to choose paint colors and fabrics that would complement an inherited Oriental rug and to furnish the room with antiques and smaller pieces from Reed Smythe & Company (the online shop founded by Keith and the late Julia Reed, a close friend). Aside from that minimal invasion, I have been allowed to do with the room as I please. I've added to my collection six proper busts that watch over me from their perches atop the bookcases—Washington, Lincoln, Jefferson, Hamilton, Benjamin Franklin, and Frederick Douglass. I am grateful to my friend the painter Michael Shane Neal for the copy of his brilliant portrait of Congressman John Lewis, the original of which was recently purchased by the National Portrait Gallery, and for his rendering of George H.W. Bush. My campaign posters from both sides of the political spectrum make for eclectic decor. What could be more fun for a political junkie than to hang JFK's 1960 campaign poster next to the iconic David Hume Kennerly black-and-white photograph of Nixon with Roy Acuff and a yo-yo on the stage at the Grand Ole Opry?

Ever since I moved into what Keith and our children ironically refer to as my "global headquarters," life inside our house has been far more harmonious. No one meddles with my papers. Or suggests a different manner of organizing. No one mentions the haze of cigar smoke that greets the few guests invited to sit on the small front porch of the library. It's bliss. I can fully attest to the pleasure—and necessity—of having a room of one's own.



A short path leads from Jon and Keith Meacham's 1929 Georgian Revival house in Nashville to the carriage house, which Meacham renovated with architect Ridley Wills and interior designers Brockschmidt & Coleman to create his office space and library.