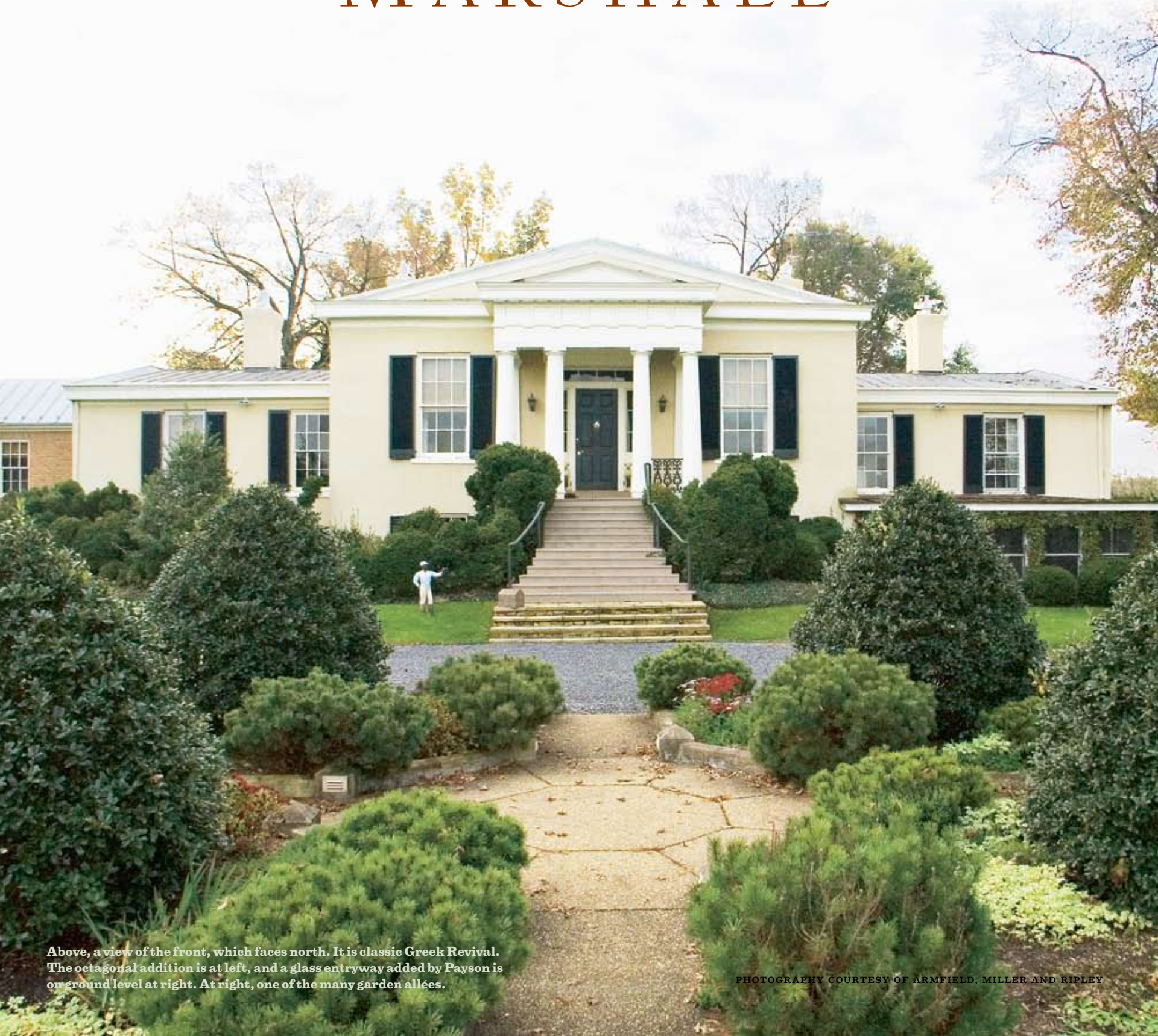


IN THE
STEPS OF
JOHN
MARSHALL

The history of the Greek Revival-style house Ashleigh parallels the history of American democracy. In this year, the 250th anniversary of Marshall's birth, GARLAND POLLARD finds the classic Fauquier farm, updated by the late arts patron Sandra Whitney Payson.



Above, a view of the front, which faces north. It is classic Greek Revival. The octagonal addition is at left, and a glass entryway added by Payson is on ground level at right. At right, one of the many garden allées.





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Marshall Smith, a John Marshall descendant, visited the home of his great grandmother Margaret Marshall Smith in the 1950s on a house tour, and then again during the late 1980s, when it was occupied by its most recent owner, Sandra Whitney Payson. “We kind of barged in, semi-unannounced,” says Smith, who says that Payson was kind enough to invite them in for tea.

On that second trip, he recalls that Payson was about to head to a Far East environmental summit with the first Bush administration. Payson is listed among *Mother Jones’* top philanthropists for environmental and social causes, and is cited as the only Democrat in the Republican-leaning Whitney family. But for all of Payson’s activism, philanthropy and art patronage, her respite was Ashleigh, which sits right at the intersection of Route 17 and Interstate 66 on the road from the town of Marshall to Delaplane. Payson lived at the house mostly from Friday to Tuesday, and spent weekdays in D.C.

Except for the slight rumble of I-66, the boxwood-filled setting feels exactly as it did in the time of Margaret Marshall, who built the house about 1840. According to the National Register listing, Margaret Marshall Smith, granddaughter of Supreme Court Chief Justice John Marshall, designed the house after a trip through the deep South. In 1845, Marshall married cousin John Thomas Smith, and they lived at the house until 1860, when it was sold just in time for Smith to lose her assets, which were invested in Confederate money. After a number of sympathetic owners, changes came to the house in 1929, when it was renovated by Dr. Edmund Horgan. It was Horgan who purchased pine paneling from the Hoover White House and installed it in Ashleigh’s English basement. It was also under Horgan’s ownership that the house went on the National Register, where the nomination form calls it “one of the most distinctive antebellum homesteads in northern Virginia.” The house is now for sale again; its owner, Sandra Whitney Payson, died July 15, 2004, and her estate has it on the market.

The Marshall family was intimately connected with the politics of the early United States, and Payson kept that tradition alive at Ashley (Payson simplified the spelling); in the White House room downstairs is a picture of Payson with President Bill Clinton, whom she supported. The place came alive with politics and arts during



Clockwise from top left, a view across the property — Payson had 17 thoroughbreds. Major John Thomas Smith (1816-72) and Margaret Lewis Marshall Smith (1823-1907), in photos circa 1870, courtesy of the family. Bottom, one of many of Payson’s sculptures that grace the landscape.



Top, the paneled room that came from the White House. Right, the main living room, which opens to the south. Above, the kitchen.



Richmond, where the Chief Justice lived on Marshall Street. Chief Justice Marshall had about 200,000 acres and gave the farm to his children; son Thomas Marshall gave the Ashleigh property to Margaret Marshall.

“The Chief built a house for everyone on the Oak Hill property,” says Marshall Smith. The Marshalls had a habit of going back and forth, generation to generation, naming their children Thomas and John and Thomas and John. Chief Justice John Marshall’s son, the Hon. Thomas Marshall, was an attorney of note who served on the Virginia Constitutional Convention. Daughter Margaret Marshall married in 1845.

Margaret Marshall Smith did not have an easy life after selling Ashleigh; she remained the model of how a Southern woman put her life together after tragedy. In an 1865 letter she laments being broke, and not having enough money for a place to live: “Do you think there will be any chance of my making my claim good against the man in Prince Wm. who bought the crop of corn at Ashleigh and who you were about to sue when we left Alex[andria]”

Thankfully, things turned out well for Margaret Marshall Smith; after the Civil War she moved to Alexandria, where she married off her three remaining daughters

the Payson ownership. Her Whitney Museum heritage meant that Ashleigh became an art gallery as well as a home, with paintings and sculptures from her collection both inside and out. While Payson led a classic jet set life, she was deeply committed to supporting local artists. For instance, a tile mural in a glassed-in entryway was designed by Joan Gardiner, a local ceramist and tile maker. And works from painter William Woodward adorn the walls.

Outside, the artwork is spectacular without overpowering the setting. While many of the sculptures are modern, they also keep to the neoclassical feel of Ashleigh, in all being on axis. Facing the south lawn, for instance, is a profile of Payson done by sculptor Xavier Campeni, whom she called the “love of her life.”

Payson’s interest in art spilled over into her personal life and entertaining at Ashleigh. Jane Alexander, who became well known for her leadership of the National Endowment for the Arts, was a guest, as was HRH Princess Michael of Kent, who is known for her interest in history and preservation.

One highlight of the spring season was Payson’s annual Peony Party, held in the immaculately kept southern gardens that feature a long allée of peonies. Payson’s chef, caretaker and friend Jose Maria, who lives on the farm with his family while the estate is settled, says, “She loved this time of the year.”



But the entertaining was not just for friends. The additions that Payson made, including an octagonal room to the east, were not only to make the house more comfortable and house Payson’s book and art collection, but included extra bedrooms for all her children and grandchildren and guests.

That the house was a fitting place for families, politics and the arts fits with the tradition established by the Marshalls over 150 years ago. In fact, Oak Hill, which was Chief Justice John Marshall’s farm, was a respite from

to graduates of the seminary, one of whom was the cousin of the Rev. W.A.R. Goodwin of Williamsburg. And they all did well. The last child, Marshall Smith’s grandfather, was the first physician to test for allergies with skin scratches. Born in Hanover, Dr. Henry Lee Smith Sr. lived until 1957, long enough to keep memories of Ashleigh alive.

Ashleigh is surrounded by 98 acres and is listed at \$3,800,000 by Gloria Armfield of Armfield, Miller & Ripley. A snappy video tour, with musical accompaniment, is online at ArmfieldMillerRipley.com.

This page, the octagonal library that Payson added on the east side of the house echoes Jefferson. A garage is tucked discreetly underneath. Facing page top, the dining room, which is in the raised basement. At bottom, even the garden gates reflect an artistic sensibility.

