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New Rooms for Old Houses



Beautiful Additions for the Traditional Home

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Project featured in this article was designed by
Peter Zimmerman Architects, Inc.
John Toates, AIA was the Principle in Charge
of Design for the project.





A HOME BUILT FROM THE LAND

Federal · Reading, Pennsylvania

This 1829 farmhouse in the rolling hills of eastern Pennsylvania is crafted from the materials that surround it: fieldstone, pine, and oak. The patient hands of time have turned the pine floors amber and the stone walls a color wheel of earth tones. The house is one with the land and history, which is precisely why the owners, two refugees from Manhattan, bought it.

The house Jeff Gorrin and Susan Fetterolf found was small: three rooms on the first floor, a kitchen the size of a pantry, and three bedrooms upstairs. One bathroom served the entire house. They needed a library to hold their book collection, a contemporary kitchen, a family room more intimate than the original parlors, a home office, and a master suite. They entrusted architects Peter Zimmerman and John Toates to find a solution that balanced their practical needs with their aesthetic sensibilities.

MAKING NEW FROM OLD

The first decision Jeff and Susan made was to use natural materials, especially salvaged materials of the era. All of the timbers for the addition were taken from one 18th-century house. As in the original house, ceilings are framed of exposed oak timbers, some as big as 8 in. by 11 in. Other than being cut to length the old timbers are unaltered, preserving their darkened faces and axe and saw markings. Roof sheathing and sub-flooring, commonly of plywood today, were made of reclaimed pine boards because their surfaces are visible in the unfinished ceiling.

The summer kitchen, nearly 200 years old and going strong, needs only an occasional tune-up. The wood needs to be painted every 10 years, the mortar repointed every 50 years. The clay roof tiles and stone walls still have many years of life in them.

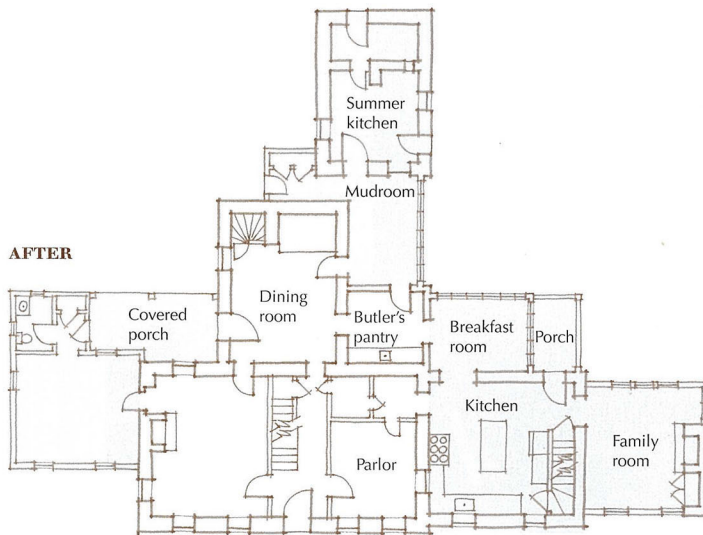


For Jeff and Susan the hardware was a defining element of the house. Though period hardware lacked technological conveniences of later eras, keeping the materials and craftsmanship intact was more important than convenience. For the new single-hung windows made of white oak, a wooden peg secures the lower sash when closed and a prop stick holds it open. Doors hang with iron strap, H or HL hinges, and they open with thumb latches; exterior doors have surface-mounted rim locks.

Finding all this early 19th-century hardware was an adventure. One expedition became many as they traveled as far as northern New England. Once their collection was complete, they sorted it according to style and formality and installed it in rooms of comparable formality. Their hard work was worth it. Every room is a gallery for a different blacksmith's craft, but the collection remains unified.

Susan and Jeff applied similar rigor to areas of the house that had no historical precedent. The mudroom, powder room, and family bath are furnished with found





objects. They purchased antique cabinets for the vanities and antique vessels for the washbowls. Drains and waterlines were added. New faucets match the antiques in style and they are finished in unlacquered brass oxidized to a dark brown.

THE KITCHEN COLLAGE

The kitchen is a symphony of materials orchestrated into a beautiful room. It, too, uses reclaimed materials: random width unfinished beadboard on the walls and waxed plank floors. This leaves the patina in place and reinforces the informality of the room. The cabinets are new but not of uniform design, like a collage. It is a clever arrangement that makes the room feel smaller, so that it doesn't overpower the older, smaller rooms nearby.



LEFT: The addition is spread around three sides of the stone house. To the left a library is added and it opens to the parlor, appropriate for two formal rooms. The right side is the casual wing of the house, with limited connection to the parlor. Support rooms and farmer's porches are to the rear and removed from the formal side of the house. **ABOVE:** The architects worked to preserve the formality of the front facade. The original house stands forward of, and taller than, the additions on either side; and the eaves, or gutter lines, of both new wings are lower than the original eave. **FACING PAGE LEFT:** This is a view of the back of the house before the addition. The original house and summer kitchen are separated by a connector. The architects worked carefully to preserve this relationship in their addition. **FACING PAGE RIGHT:** Buildings crafted of natural materials are timeless. Suspend time in your addition by using natural materials. Select the materials to be in harmony with your original house and you will leave an enduring legacy for future generations to enjoy.



KEEPING IT MODEST

The old farmhouse was small and simply detailed, but proudly crafted. Preserving the scale, craft, and charm was paramount. Because the addition was to be as large as the original house the architects divided it into three sections, placing one on each side of the house and one in the rear. The new wings to either side

are telescopes. The balance and formality of the front facade is preserved. The rear addition is sheltered by an assortment of gable and shed roofs casually organized as one would expect on the rear of an old farmhouse. The addition also connects with the old summer kitchen, adding “reclaimed” floor area to the house.

The stone facade is the first thing you notice upon arriving at the house. Its warmth and permanence leave a lasting impression. The architects used stone sparingly in the addition so as not to steal the stage from the original. The wing

ABOVE: The new family room has a cathedral ceiling, rare in early 19th-century rooms. Here it works well because antique materials and framing methods are used. Also, the ceiling joists, horizontal boards that “tie” opposing sides of a roof together, give the room a human scale and suggest that a plaster ceiling may have once hung from them.



to the right of the front facade telescopes in two sections. The first section, which is two stories, is stone taken from the yard and laid to match the original. The second section, one-story tall, is clapboard except for the chimney end wall. All other new wings are clapboard, the most formal of wood sidings but less formal than stone, distinguishing them from the original house. Clapboards and trim are painted olive green, giving the facades a monolithic appearance that also helps them recede from prominence. To the rear, the addition is low slung and covered with a standing seam metal roof painted red oxide to blend with the red clay tiles of the summer kitchen. Casement windows, hidden from public view, wrap the walls to take in the private garden and bucolic setting.

Jeff and Susan preserved the spirit of a fine home built when homes were of necessity made from their surroundings and were a part of the land. They built for future generations as well as themselves, and they have added greatly to the joy that may be had in this house.

ABOVE: The new kitchen is large enough to host a party. The owners shunned a uniform kitchen in favor of a collection of materials deftly organized. A pewter counter caps the island and Italian marble of a similar gray finishes the perimeter cabinets. Two porcelain farmer's sinks paired with brushed nickel spigots stand ready to wash or fill anything coming their way. NEXT SPREAD: The back addition is informal. Windows and doors are placed where needed without regard to formal aesthetic rules. Shed dormers, a less formal roof shape, cover the lower parts of the house while gables cap the taller portions beyond.

