

# Clem Labine's Period Homes

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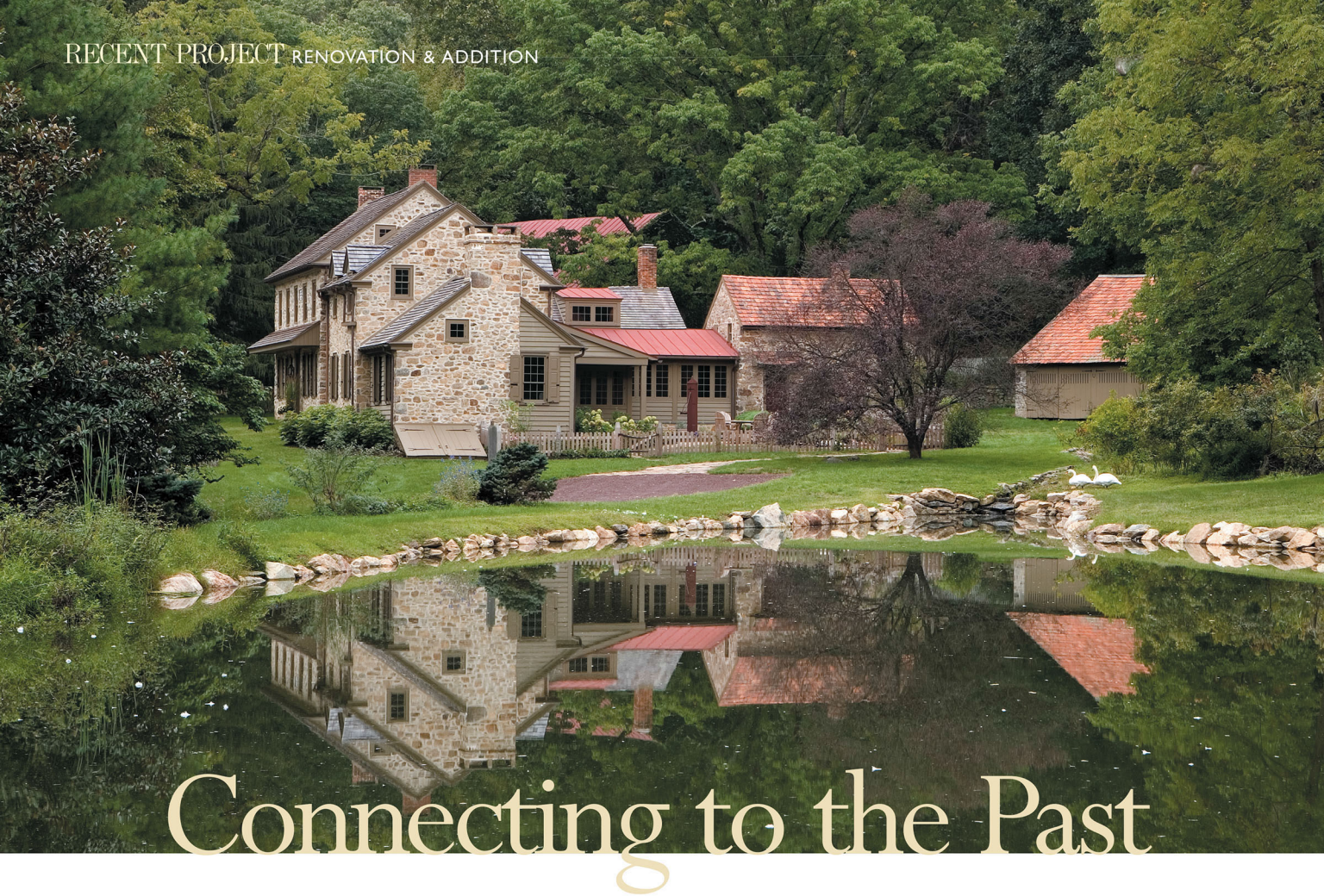
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Project featured in this article was designed by  
Peter Zimmerman Architects, Inc.  
John Toates, AIA was the Principle in Charge  
of Design for the project.



# Connecting to the Past

Additions and renovations transform a 19th-century stone house into a period home with hidden modern amenities.

**PROJECT:** VILLAGE FARM, OLEY, PA

**ARCHITECT:** PETER ZIMMERMAN ARCHITECTS, BERWYN, PA;

PETER ZIMMERMAN, AIA, & JOHN F. TOATES, AIA, PRINCIPALS IN CHARGE

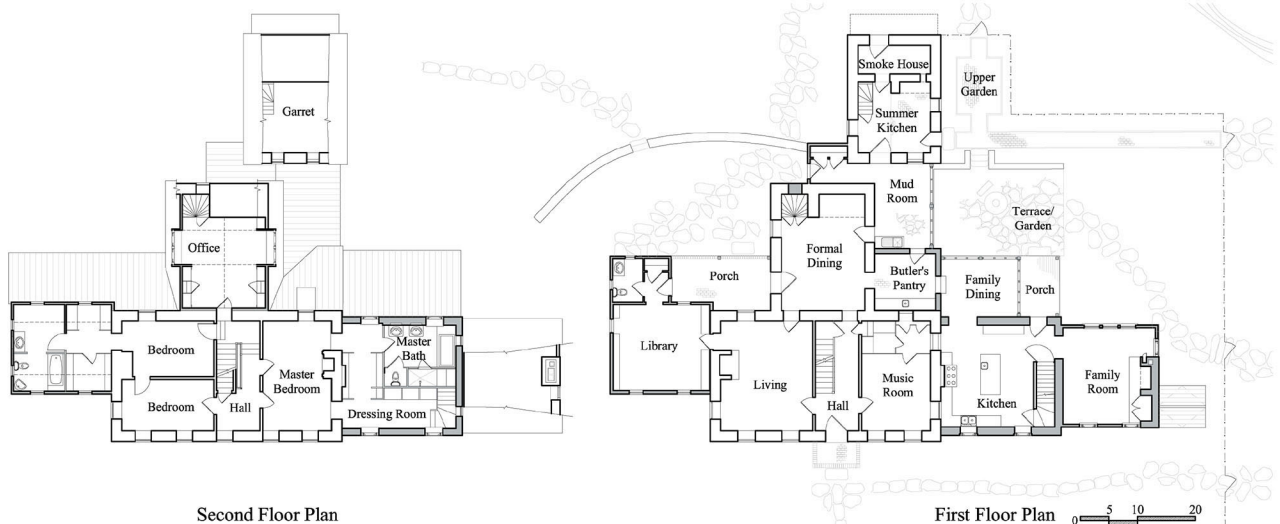
**GENERAL CONTRACTOR:** GRIFFITHS CONSTRUCTION, CHESTER SPRINGS, PA

“What was unique was the clients’ passionate interest in the whole process,” says PZA principal Peter Zimmerman. “They were interested in every single detail and were willing to take the time to develop it properly. It was a long process, but they were much more interested in it being absolutely right than rushing to a conclusion.”

“One of the project’s challenges was the clients’ desire to have every visible material in the house be from the correct historical period and region,” adds principal John F. Toates. “We had to design and integrate a 21st-century home’s infrastructure and lifestyle needs into the appearance of an 19th-century house. The doors, floors, walls and ceilings are all antique – yet if you could see behind these materials you would find a very modern building.”

The existing five-room main house was built in the 1820s on the footprint of an even earlier (1740s) log home. In the 19th century, the property was used as a tannery, taking advantage of the many nearby springs. The main house was approximately 2,500 sq.ft. and the site also included a number of outbuildings, some of which were integrated into the new

**W**hen a busy New York City family bought a farmhouse that dates from the 1820s in Oley, PA, the original idea was to establish a weekend retreat. As time went by, the family decided to convert it into their full-time home, necessitating the addition of more space and the restoration of existing areas. The goal for Berwyn, PA-based Peter Zimmerman Architects (PZA) was clear: retain the 19th-century authenticity of the home while discreetly bringing it into the 21st century.



Second Floor Plan

First Floor Plan 0 5 10 20

Keeping the existing 1820s stone house as the centerpiece, Zimmerman and Toates added a kitchen, family room, family dining room, porch, butler’s pantry, mudroom and library on the first floor (right) and two bathrooms, two dressing rooms and an office on the second floor (left). *Floor plans: courtesy of Peter Zimmerman Architects*

Top: Peter Zimmerman Architects restored and made additions to a 2,500-sq.ft. 19th-century stone house in Pennsylvania, creating a 5,000-sq.ft structure with a rich architectural story. *All photos: Tom Crane Photography*



home. The program called for the addition of a kitchen, family dining area, family room, first-floor library, butler's pantry, an open porch and an enclosed porch on the ground floor. On the upper level, a full bath and closet for the existing bedrooms were added, along with a complete new master suite. Ultimately the work doubled the size of the home to approximately 5,000 sq.ft.

The existing home, keeping room and summer kitchen were restored, as were some of the outbuildings. Several inappropriate contemporary modifications and additions were removed. The space above the keeping

room became a home office and the attic was converted into a guest suite.

"Historically, there have always been multiple buildings on the site, such as the original smokehouse/summer kitchen, so there was a clear scale of volumes and vocabulary already established," says Zimmerman. "We broke the additions down into elements that allowed the original house to be the dominant feature. You can clearly see an architectural story of additions. The way these volumes have been connected illustrates each layer in the historical evolution of the home."

PZA started the process by creating a master site design that established a relationship between the main house, the outbuildings, the new driveway, garage and gardens to "embrace the historical evolution of the property while accommodating modern family requirements," says Zimmerman. "The house is situated between a road and a pond, and the driveway was in between the house and the pond. There are a number of springs on the property and across the street, so extensive excavation and dewatering of the site were required before any work could begin. Part of the dewatering system was ultimately incorporated into a functioning well in the kitchen garden. Early in the design process, we planned to re-route the driveway and approach to the far side of the pond and add a bridge across the pond, but this was not completed until recently because of regulatory issues. We carefully work with the challenges that a project presents to convert them from liabilities into opportunities."

"Another challenge was how to double the size of the house without having the additions overwhelm the original scale," says Toates. This was solved by keeping the existing home as the center of the enlarged structure and by linking some of the detached outbuildings to it. For example, the original keeping room became the new dining room and the original summer kitchen/smokehouse at the rear was linked to the existing structure by adding a porch that functions as a mudroom and potting area. Other additions flanking the existing home include the butler's pantry, the family dining room, the new stone kitchen and family room, a library and a rear porch.

The new additions are carefully detailed to reflect the historical evolution of the property. "We envisioned the connecting spaces as 'cartilage,' which respects the individuality of the buildings and also joins them together," says Toates.

"The overall massing," says Zimmerman, "allows the oldest portions to retain their integrity and the new additions to act as links between the landscape, outbuildings and spaces within the house."

In both new and restored areas, every effort was made to keep an authentic 19th-century appearance, with contemporary structures and conveniences kept out of sight. For example, a steel and engineered-lumber framework sandwiched between the kitchen ceiling and the antique flooring on the second floor allows the kitchen's appearance to be historically correct and provides the support needed for the second floor.

The roofing and walls in the family room are conventionally framed, with an antique roof sheathing and rafter system beneath the modern framing to ensure accurate historical detail. A flat-screen television is concealed in the cabinetry adjacent to the fireplace, behind doors that use antique hardware hinges. "They wanted the house to feel and seem like an



PZA connected the separation between the existing main house and the summer kitchen with the addition of a mudroom/potting room. The clapboard-sided library and rear porch were added to the west side of the house.



A restored pump is now the focal point of the kitchen garden on the east side of the house, toward the pond. The brick path leads directly into the summer kitchen; the new mudroom/potting area links the formerly detached summer kitchen to the formal dining room and the butler's pantry.

19th-century house, but at the same time, they did not want to sacrifice the expected conveniences of modern life," says Toates.

Another effort to maintain authenticity was the well in the kitchen garden. At an auction, the client found an historically significant pump handle and spout that is documented in the book *Early Domestic Architecture of Pennsylvania*. Separately, they also located an antique well headstone (signed and dated 1748) and a craftsman with the traditional skills who could construct the fully functional wooden pump body. The pump and well head were installed over the previously installed dewatering system, marrying historical elements with contemporary building techniques to re-create a working well that is now the focal point of the kitchen garden.

"Early in the design process the clients began collecting antique materials for the home," says Zimmerman. "By their own choice, each piece was required to be historically correct in its age and its place of origin, and they had to be installed in an historically correct manner." In some cases, this meant that the architects had to delay the final design of certain areas until the right door, sink or piece of hardware was found. In the potting room, for example, Toates and Zimmerman left a portion of the design unfinished until the clients found the stone sink they wanted. They then designed and constructed the potting table to work with it.

After beginning the design work in the early part of 2002, construction began in the fall of 2004 and was completed almost two years later in the spring of 2006. The family and the architects have created a home, not a museum, that honors the heritage of the site while providing for the needs of contemporary living. — *Martha McDonald*



Antique and historic materials used throughout the house conceal contemporary systems. The kitchen features historic beams in the ceiling, antique flooring and the pewter island top made in England was selected because it develops a patina that ages with the house.



In the new potting room, Zimmerman and Toates incorporated an antique sink acquired by the clients during construction. The exterior stone walls of the keeping room were left exposed and the ceiling structure is antique with original blue paint.



In the family room, antique roof rafters, roof sheathing and flooring provide a period appearance.



An antique dry sink was converted into a working sink in the first-floor powder room. A handmade copper vessel serves as the sink basin and the antique brass fixtures are left exposed. An antique candle lantern was electrified and serves as the lighting for the bathroom.