

Rooted by Renovation

A couple recommits to an agrarian lifestyle
by reinvigorating their rural farmhouse

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With its glass top and stainless base, the contemporary lines of the Highbridge Desk from Ralph Lauren Home are quite striking in comparison to the cozy confines of the stone-walled study at the front of the home, which had been part of the front porch. The blanket chest was restored by the artisans at Bittners.

“This is where the feathers from my nest are,” said the wife in reference to the rural Southern Indiana home where she and her husband have lived for 20 years and remodeled no less than five times. The most recent transformation, finished this past May, serves as a firm affirmation that the 800-acre property is where they plan to stay.

An avid hunter, the husband was originally drawn to what was then a 200-acre property for its abundance of wild game. The original 30-foot by 60-foot home, heated by a wood stove, had one small bath – an impossible scenario for a professional couple who had three young sons at the time. So began a journey of renovation, with the property evolving to meet the needs of the family. “As we all know, one thing always leads to another and another,” joked the wife.

The ambitious scale of their latest project was originally prompted by the need for major repairs. During the initial

planning stages, the couple sat down with long-time collaborator and friend, interior designer Ron Wolz of Bittners, to do some pie-in-the-sky thinking. Architect Ed Krebs of K. Norman Berry Associates and Bill Receveur of Realm Construction rounded out the project team. During the yearlong construction, the homeowners moved nearly all of their things into storage and lived in an adjacent guest cottage.

Originally built on a slab foundation, a large addition at the rear to accommodate a new kitchen, sitting room, library and master bathroom also allowed for a basement, an initial afterthought that has proven to be quite useful. “The old floor plan lacked a good flow, so the aim of the project was to create comfortable, cozy and unpretentious spaces that can accommodate their growing family and gatherings they host for their church,” explained Wolz.



Red plaid accent pillows on the cozy L-shaped sectional in a nook off the kitchen mimic the colors of the weathered barns just outside the windows.



Just inside the front door, the fragrant aroma of cedar, used for the walls in the living room and kitchen, conjures up visions of classic upscale hunting lodges in the American West. With the exception of a few key sentimental pieces – a rocking chair in the living room that belonged to the wife’s grandmother and a blanket chest in the study that was restored by the artisans at Bittners – nearly all of the furnishings in the remodeled or added spaces are new. Though also new to the rooms, the wide plank hardwood floors by Kentucky Board Works are all reclaimed wood, as are the ceiling beams and stair rail, which were installed by Bill Pace. “They add a great deal of integrity to the rooms,” added Wolz.

With its glass top and polished stainless steel sawhorse legs, the contemporary lines of the Highbridge Desk from Ralph Lauren Home are quite striking in comparison to the cozy confines of the stone-walled study at the front of the home, which had been part of the front porch. “I like the surprise of

introducing the modern element,” said Wolz. In the adjacent vaulted living room, a grandly scaled French chandelier and 1920s Italian console with horse head motifs were two of the first pieces Wolz acquired for the project. Upholstered pieces are primarily comprised of leather and suede. An ideal embodiment of the tricky art of mixing styles and periods, Wolz is particularly enamored with the Colorado Club Chair from Ralph Lauren Home, which melds the lines of a 1940s lounge chair with Western-style whipstitched edges and nickel nailheads (it is also supremely comfortable to boot). The wife had purchased the coyote throw for her husband several Christmases ago and was thrilled that it proved to be the perfect accessory for the rolled arm sofa with nailhead trim. The subtlest hint of shimmer can be detected on the wall opposite the stone fireplace courtesy of wallpaper from Ralph Lauren. “I love the depth it adds against the texture of the wood,” said Wolz.



The dining table was handmade by craftsmen at Bittners using old growth timbers reclaimed from the 200 year-old building that is now the Frazier History Museum. The kitchen, designed by Ken Fromme of Atteberry Smith, includes a La Cornue range and a refrigerator/freezer concealed behind vintage-inspired wooden icebox panels with dog and handle latches.

Certain to incite envy in the heart of any gourmand is the covetable La Cornue Château Series range, an item on the husband's must-have list. "He saw a canary yellow one in a Williams-Sonoma store and was never the same after," said the wife with a laugh. A transom window above the range hood was added to permit additional natural light. "I like the quirkiness of its unique placement," said Wolz. Rivaling the range in interest in the galley-style kitchen, which was designed by Ken Fromme of Atteberry Smith, is a refrigerator/freezer concealed behind vintage-inspired wooden icebox panels with dog and handle latches.

A large pot rack hangs above the long island separating the kitchen from the dining area, which can comfortably accommodate eight. Craftsmen at Bittners made the one-of-a-kind table using old growth timbers reclaimed from the 200 year-old building that is now the Frazier History Museum. The

artisanal quality is underscored by butterfly joints and pins and a hand-carved date on the table's top.

Red plaid accent pillows on the cozy L-shaped sectional in a nook off the kitchen mimic the colors of the weathered barns just outside the windows. Having actively farmed the land for years has given the wife a different perspective on agrarianism: "To be able to keep up with all of the hard work, it has to be in the fabric of who you are. People whose livelihood depends on farming have my utmost respect."

A sitting room located between the kitchen and the wife's study provides access to the pool terrace with a pergola fashioned from hand-hewn barn beams. Country cottage charm is conveyed via the beadboard ceiling, a ticking rug over the stone floor and floral chintz drapery.

The high-tech electronic heart of the home, installed by Crawford Entertainment, is concealed behind rustic barn



A grandly scaled French chandelier and 1920s Italian console with horse head motifs in the foreground were two of the first pieces interior designer Ron Wolz acquired for the project.





The second floor bunk room is designed to comfortably accommodate friends who visit for hunting outings.



Walls upholstered in silk add to the restful appeal of the master bedroom. Taking a design cue from other rooms on the first floor, the traditional tufted bench at the foot of the carved bed is upholstered with hide.



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doors on slide mounts. Keeping with the equestrian theme, the walls of neighboring powderroom are dressed with Scalandre "Hunt Party" toile.

Cognizant of the siteline down the long hallway that leads from the living room, past a child's bedroom and into the husband's study adjoining the master bedroom, Wolz carefully created a vignette highlighting one of the husband's prized buck trophies. "It was the only one he elected to display so we gave it a place of prominence," explained Wolz. Accentuating his flair for mixing periods, the room's furnishings include a campaign-style desk and a retro chrome and leather chair. A door at the entrance to the study allows the master wing to be completely closed off from the rest of the house for privacy.

Walls upholstered in silk add to the restful appeal of the master bedroom. During the renovation, longer windows were added to the room to maximize views of gardens designed by Jon Carloftis and of fields and woodlands that stretch as far as the eye can see. The neutral color palette was also selected so as not to compete with the seasonal colors outside. Taking a design cue

from other rooms on the first floor, the traditional tufted bench at the foot of the carved bed is upholstered with hide.

Uniquely configured his and her vanities in the master bath, also designed by Ken Fromme of Atteberry Smith, allow the wife to have a separate vanity table on her side. The floors are travertine and vanity tops are emperador marble. A freestanding tub is centered with a high decorative window. A large shared closet provides direct access to the laundry.

The second floor is comprised of a bunkroom, craft room, full bath and morning kitchen. Wolz self-proclaimed "signature elements" - tartan plaids and grass cloth wall coverings - abound. The wife's carefully designed craft room provides storage for her varied pursuits, from sewing to finger-painting with the grandchildren.

Even after decades of commuting to Louisville for work and other errands, the wife is no less contented with living in what her "city friends" would refer to as the hinterland. Their most recent renovation has only solidified her roots. "In the end we've made the home a lot more livable," she said. **sl**