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Resurrection

A Revolutionary War–era stone farmhouse is restored with a preservationist's attention to detail

BY JEFFREY DOLAN

In the midst of the Revolutionary War, farmer John Edwards erected a fieldstone house on a hill overlooking his 300-acre Pennsylvania estate. Designed in a regional variation on the Georgian style, the house's walls were constructed of stones hauled from surrounding fields and topped with a simple gable roof. In the subsequent centuries, however, neglect and misguided remodeling played havoc with the structure. By the early 2000s, the house was overgrown with vegetation, the stonework was obscured by stucco, and the original aesthetic was compromised by ungainly renovations from the 1960s. Though unsure of what they might find beneath, our clients purchased the old farmhouse with a plan to transform it into a comfortable home in which to raise their family.

By partnering with local craftsmen who were familiar with this style, we were able to re-create the home's interior and exterior with traditional details gleaned from our firm's studies of local vernacular. With all projects of this type, I find myself fascinated with the process of peeling back layers of modernization to rediscover the details and character that give homes

Diamond in the rough. *Obscured by stucco for decades (above), the fieldstone shell of John Edwards's 1776 homestead lends an unmistakable character to the house (right). The rehabilitated dining room (left) retains its straightforward colonial charm.*

Top photo: courtesy of Jeffrey Dolan

BEST TRADITIONAL HOME

Adapting a home built more than 200 years ago to the demands of contemporary living is hard enough; doing so while faithfully restoring the original spirit of the structure requires an exceptional understanding of traditional architecture as well as an unwavering commitment to the process. In this remodel, partner Jeffrey Dolan of Period Architecture Ltd. successfully fuses modern necessities with the spirit of this home's early American origins.

EVOLUTION OF A FLOOR PLAN

Additions and alterations spanning four centuries make this farmhouse a unique study in how a home evolves to meet changing needs. Most visible is the addition of space, with the introduction of separate areas designed for specific functions, such as dining, cooking, bathing, and later, parking the car.

18th century

Constructed of fieldstone in 1776, the original farmhouse consisted of a two-story rectangle with fireplaces on each gable end and an entrance on the long side.

19th century

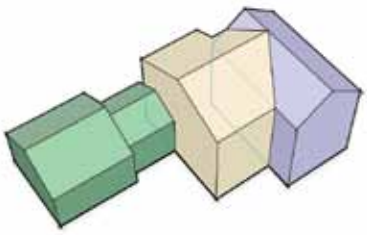
A two-story addition (c. 1820), also made of local stone, provided additional gathering and sleeping space for the family as the farm grew in size.

Meeting halfway. *Creating a comfortable home for the 21st century meant designing a roomy, updated kitchen and an equally spacious mudroom. Details such as reproduction iron hardware keep the newer spaces grounded in the colonial age.*

Hinting at history. *A family-room addition puts comfort first but leaves a shared stone wall uncovered as a nod to the home's original structure.*

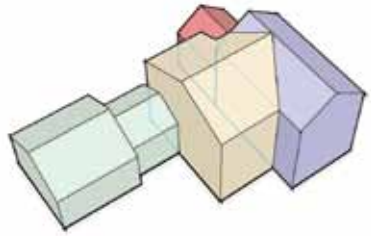
Celebration of structure. *In the master bedroom, both the stone wall and the chestnut ceiling beams are revealed.*

Top drawings: Dan Thornton. Floor-plan drawings: Martha Garstang Hill.



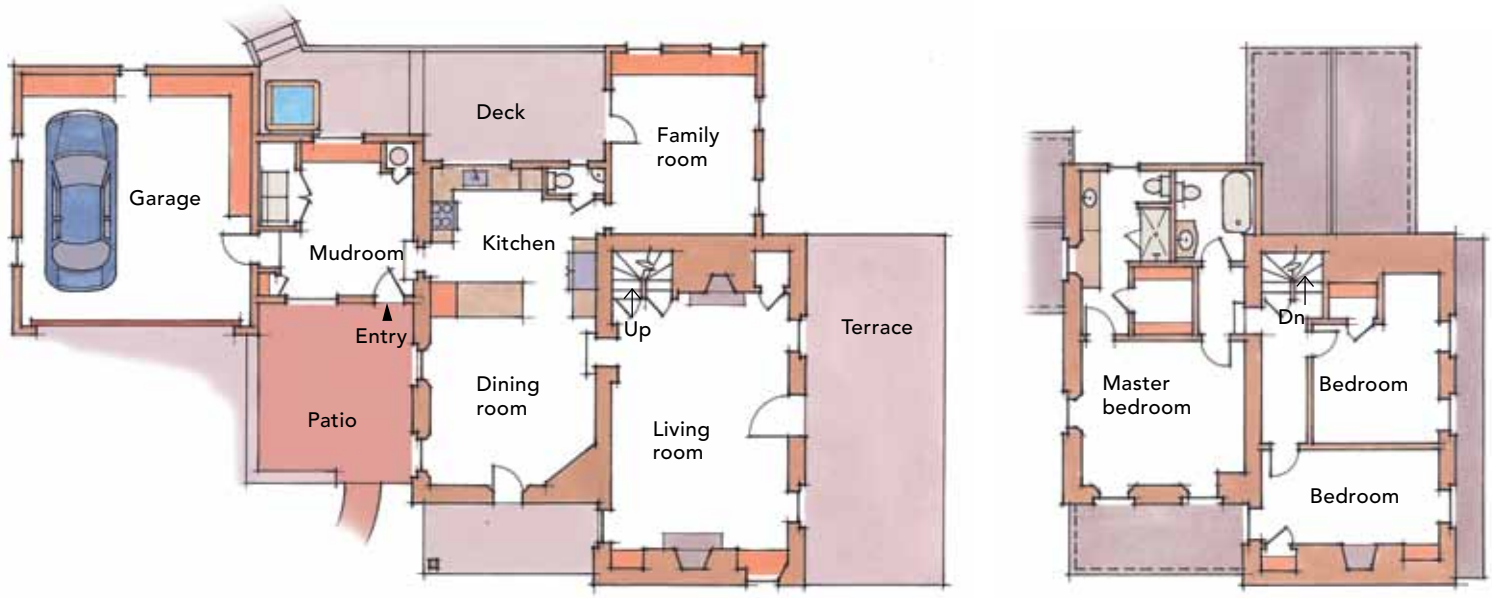
20th century

In the 1960s, a garage was added, with a mudroom linking it to the main house. The 1776 space, serving as a living room, was divided. The 1820 addition became a kitchen and dining room.



21st century

A family room was added off the kitchen, along with a new patio. The kitchen and dining room were rejoined, and the partition dividing the living room was removed. The primary entrance now leads into a spacious mudroom.



SPECS

Bedrooms: 3 **Bathrooms:** 2½ **Size:** 2800 sq. ft. **Cost:** $250 per sq. ft.
Year built: original, 1776; latest renovation, 2011 **Location:** Media, Pa.
Architect: Period Architecture Ltd., periodarchitectureltd.com

like this their original beauty. Unlike building a new residence, where work starts with design and planning, this project by necessity began with the undoing of previous renovations to reveal clues about the original aesthetic and function of the home.

Demolition moves the project forward

The demolition crew stripped the interior structure down to expose thick fieldstone walls and removed several unnecessary, non-load-bearing interior partitions. Water-damaged drywall, cracked and buckling plaster, and shabby carpet were removed throughout the home to reveal beautifully aged hand-hewn chestnut beams, white-oak flooring, and stone walls. We chose to feature the few original architectural details that survived—including the stonework, original beams, and flooring—and complemented them with appropriate reproductions as we added back layers of finish. For example, the original fireplace mantels of the living room had been removed and replaced with more "modern" Victorian mantels that were later painted a bright aqua sometime in the 1960s. With no visual record of the original mantels, we drew on our research of colonial-era Pennsylvania farmhouses to customize a period-appropriate design crafted by McGinnis Millwork of Parkesburg, Pa. As storage wasn't part of John Edwards's master plan, we took every opportunity to develop built-in cabinetry and closets wherever we could.

The house has a single, box-winder staircase that is a hallmark of a colonial stone farmhouse. Although the staircase is small, dark, and somewhat difficult to traverse from floor to floor, modern code requirements made creating a new staircase within the confines of the existing house impractical, so we left it alone.

Restoring exterior charm

After stripping the stucco from the exterior, mason Cleveland Ambris began the painstaking task of repointing the entire house with a historically correct, hydraulic, lime-based (rather than portland-cement-based) mortar mix. Used for centuries, lime-based mortar is more flexible and won't crack or spall. The entire process took Ambris about three months to complete.

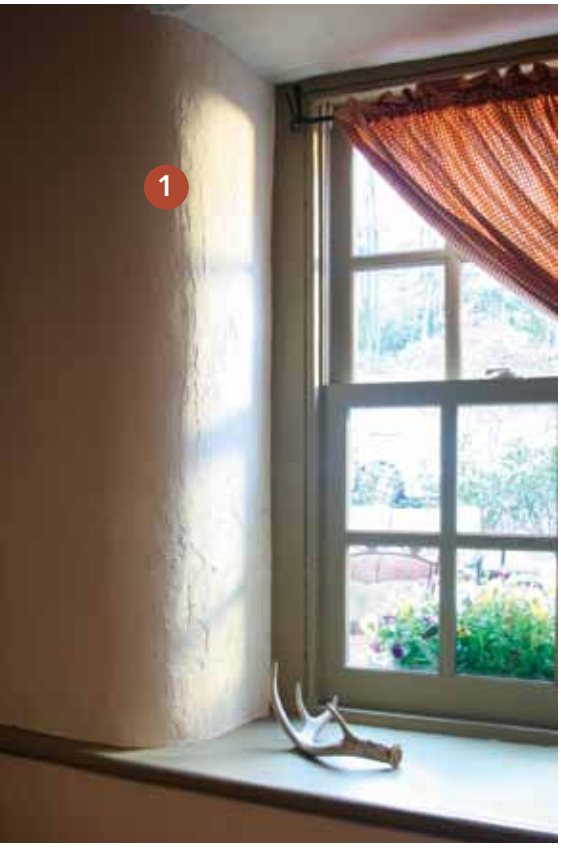
In need of an immediate fix to stop leaks from deteriorating the house any further, the roof was recovered with asphalt shingles. Eventually, a new cedar-shake roof will be the final step in restoring the farmhouse.

Vinyl siding at the garage and pent roof sheltering the original front door was replaced with cedar siding. The exterior of the framed mudroom extension, added in the 1960s, was disguised with a more period-appropriate veneer of chinked oak logs.

During a previous renovation, the original wood windows and antique glass had been replaced with mass-produced vinyl windows

HALLMARKS OF A STYLE

Popular in England in the 17th and 18th centuries and subsequently adopted in the colonies, the Georgian style of this house harks back to classical forms of the Italian Renaissance. In Pennsylvania, these homes typically took the form of a two-story brick or stone structure with a gable roof and a symmetrical arrangement of windows and doors on the front. While many hallmarks of the style may have originated across the ocean, materials used here were largely indigenous. Few interior details survived in the house, but its structure offered an authentic framework upon which those details could be convincingly re-created.



Interior

1. Plaster on interior walls
2. Locally forged iron hardware
3. Raised panel or cope-and-pattern (vertical board) walls at fireplaces
4. Box-winder staircase
5. Plaster firebox
6. Fireplaces at end walls
7. Brick or stone hearth
8. Wood floors, casing, and baseboards

RESOURCES

Kitchen and millwork Kevin McGinnis, McGinnis Millwork, mcginnismillwork.com

Light fixtures and hardware Heritage Metalworks, heritage-metalworks.com

Hardware Monroe Coldren & Son monroecoldren.com

Shutters Vixen Hill, vixenhill.com

Windows Marvin Windows & Doors marvin.com

Masonry Cleveland Ambris, Ambris Residential Masonry & Restoration

Plaster Jack Thompson

Paint Authentic Colors of Philadelphia line, Finnaren & Haley, fhpaint.com

Living-room table and chairs McLimans Furniture Warehouse, mclimans.com

Chandeliers Irvin's Country Tinware irvins.com

RESEARCH

National

Library of Congress
loc.gov

National Trust for Historic Preservation
preservationnation.org

Local

Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia
preservationalliance.com

The Athenaeum of Philadelphia
philaathenaeum.org

Colonial Pennsylvania Plantation
colonialplantation.org

Exterior

⑨ Stone or brick construction

⑩ Small roofs to protect entries

⑪ Window-pane ratio of 8:10 (8 in. wide by 10 in. tall)

⑫ Window shutters

⑬ Gable-roof pitch between 8-in-12 and 10-in-12

⑭ Stone quoins

⑮ Chimneys on gable end

retrofitted into the masonry openings. Casings and jambs were sloppily packed in to make up any discrepancy in sizes. We selected wood replacement windows by Marvin with historically appropriate details and six-over-six divided lites. These windows enabled us to maintain the character of the home while taking advantage of their thermal performance. In addition, each window was custom-made to its specific opening for a tight fit.

In old homes, it can be challenging to incorporate modern conveniences such as heating, cooling, and plumbing. The bathrooms were renovated in their original locations to take advantage of existing plumbing lines. For heating and cooling, we installed two heat pumps: one in the basement to service the first floor and one in the attic to service the second floor. This approach eliminated the need for soffits and chases of ductwork to deliver heating and cooling from room to room and from floor to floor. Wrought-iron registers presented a great material choice appropriate for this older home.

A family room offers a place to relax

Despite all the additions over the years, the house lacked an informal family-gathering space. To remedy this, we designed a family-room addition with a one-and-a-half-story cathedral ceiling off one side of the kitchen; on another side, we added access to a new patio for outdoor entertaining. Double French doors allow light and visual connection to the landscape, which were important to our clients.

While the furnishings here are comfortably modern, we imbued this new family room with colonial-inspired details such as character-grade oak floors, reclaimed beadboard wainscot, and a long, built-in window seat with cubbies for storage. The exterior stone wall was left exposed for its textural aesthetic and for a subtle connection between this new space and the original 1776 house. □

Jeffrey Dolan is a co-founder of Period Architecture in West Chester, Pa. Photos by Charles Bickford, except where noted.