

THE SIX PRINCIPLES OF A FARMHOUSE AESTHETIC

Location: Chester County, Pennsylvania

Architect: Period Architecture



Nestled amidst rolling hills, babbling creeks, and a quilted tapestry of verdant farmland just west of Philadelphia sits Chester County, Pennsylvania, site of the American Revolutionary War's Battle of Brandywine and the Valley Forge encampment. It's an area that still boasts many 18th-century buildings and farmhouses that provide a look into the lifestyle and architectural vernacular of the country's earliest days.

Often that vernacular takes the shape of the American farmhouse. Designed to accommodate a lifestyle focused on putting down roots—both figuratively and literally—the farmhouse is utilitarian yet aesthetically pleasing, spacious yet cozy, classic yet endlessly fresh, and built to last while changing with the seasons.

It's here in Greater Philadelphia that Period Architecture has dedicated itself to uniting architectural traditions of the past with contemporary lifestyles and technology. Throughout its decades of building and renovating period homes across the eastern U.S., several patterns have emerged as a roadmap for capturing the essence of farmhouse style. These six principles are the foundation upon which any home—old or new—can foster a timeless, authentic farmhouse aesthetic that takes its cue from history while rising to the demands of modern living.



PRINCIPLE ONE: A SENSE OF PLACE AND HISTORY

Authenticity is central to the farmhouse aesthetic. Every detail is carefully considered to ensure that it feels appropriate to the home's history, environment, community, climate, and architectural language. It's why Period architects look to precedent to inspire similar functionality and charm that apply today. First, the American farmhouse is intricately tied to its geographic region. A new farmhouse, much like its historic predecessors, should feel born from and carved into its surroundings to complement, rather than overwhelm, the landscape. One of the ways Period Architecture accomplishes this is by preserving as many of a property's mature trees as possible. It's also important to consider the harmony of the home and land as a whole. Take into

consideration, for example, the curve of the drive as you enter the property; the angle at which you happen upon a small, stone spring house; or the relationship between a rustic barn looming in the distance and the grand main house.

Establishing a sense of time is also key to authenticity. A farmhouse should tell a story by creating the impression that it was built in phases over time; historically, as a farming family succeeded and grew, their house grew too. Other methods for instilling history into a newer farmhouse are to use archetypal features like a farmhouse sink in period-inspired kitchens and bathrooms; use deep window sills and interior walls to create the illusion of the thick, solid stone walls of yesteryear; select historically inspired paint colors; incorporate raised-panel and carriage-house-style doors;

and incorporate natural materials indicative of the area and period in which the home might have been constructed.

PRINCIPLE TWO: ORGANIC AND SALVAGED MATERIALS

Before cross-country transport of materials started in the mid-19th century, people lived strictly off the land and repurposed as often as possible. Today, organic and salvaged materials serve a three-pronged purpose: to give a nod to the past; create instant warmth, character, and charm; and honor the environment through reuse. Consider the following organic and salvaged materials for your farmhouse:

Stone and brick. Farmers of the past harvested stone from their fields to use as a sturdy and inexpensive building material. In modern farmhouses, locally harvested or salvaged stone and brick is

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used for facades, fireplaces, floors, cornices, and quoins (large cornerstones classic in stone homes).

Wood. With trees aplenty, farmers once cut lumber from their property and hand-hewed beams to provide structure to their homes. Wooden boards and beams reclaimed from old barns make regular appearances in the homes Period builds in the form of furniture, millwork, cabinetry, siding, floors, roofing, and more.

Iron. Used most often for hardware—think strap and latch hinges, box locks, and shutter hardware—as well as lighting, there are still many companies and artisans that hand-forged their ironware using the time-tested methods of days past.

PRINCIPLE THREE: MILLWORK AND ARCHITECTURAL DETAILS

In the days before modern machinery, every detail of a home was crafted by hand. The time, money, and skill it required to accent a house with decorative millwork and other architectural details showcased the wealth and success of the homeowner. Today, classic styles of decorative millwork in kitchens and bathrooms, on staircases and balusters, and in the form of casing, trim, cornices, and other interior and exterior detailing harken back to those days. Dormers and porches are also staples of early farmhouse style. Traditionally, porches were purely practical spaces created to keep the interior of the home clean, where muddy boots and soiled clothing from long hours working in the fields could be removed before heading inside. Dormers also once served a utilitarian purpose—to increase usable space, sunlight, and air circulation in the steep-roofed top floor of a home.

PRINCIPLE FOUR: INDOOR-OUTDOOR LIVING

Perhaps the most endearing aspect of farmhouse living is the nostalgia it inspires for a time when life was lived in close connection with nature, rather than technology. When siting a Period Architecture home, they pay close attention to environmental factors such as how they can utilize southern exposure to create sun-drenched spaces and the way the wind travels across a property. The Dutch door, for example, originally designed to let refreshing breezes in while keeping farm critters out, is very much still a celebrated feature



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of today's farmhouses, both for its aesthetic value and its role as a bridge between the inside and outside. Similarly, open and covered porches, verandas, gardens, and outdoor fireplaces

enhance and extend the amount of time one can spend enjoying the fresh air.

PRINCIPLE FIVE: UNITY OF OLD AND NEW

Historic appreciation and reproduction takes the best of the past and makes it work for today's world. Shutters, for example, which were once used to protect windows and provide security on the first floor (solid or paneled) and ventilation on the second floor (louvered), are mostly decorative features today. Modern composite "woods" have similarly replaced some natural woods in today's farmhouses, as they lend a comparable look and warmth but are longer lasting, lower maintenance, and rot- and bug-resistant. And where the fireplace was once the chief home-heating element, there are now central and geothermal heating and cooling systems. Combined with energy-efficient windows, insulation, and state-of-the-art home automation technology, modern homes can bring the best of new advances to the farms of yesteryear.

PRINCIPLE SIX: FAMILY-FOCUSED COMFORT AND LIVABILITY

The most alluring feature of the farmhouse is also the most fundamental: its inherent comfort, livability, and family-centered appeal. Period modifies and maximizes traditional layouts to accommodate modern family living by reworking servant quarters and kitchens into functional mudrooms; modifying traditional center halls and closed kitchens to create convenient, open floor plans; and incorporating master suites with luxurious closets, bathrooms, and views. Laundry rooms and extra storage are added where they never existed in the past. Stair halls, butler's pantries, and mudrooms become key support spaces.

From quaint, historic stone homes to modern, sprawling country estates, the farmhouse is an enduring beacon of authenticity, family roots, and provincial pride that beats on in the hearts of all who find a sense of home—and of self—on the winding dirt roads of the great American countryside.