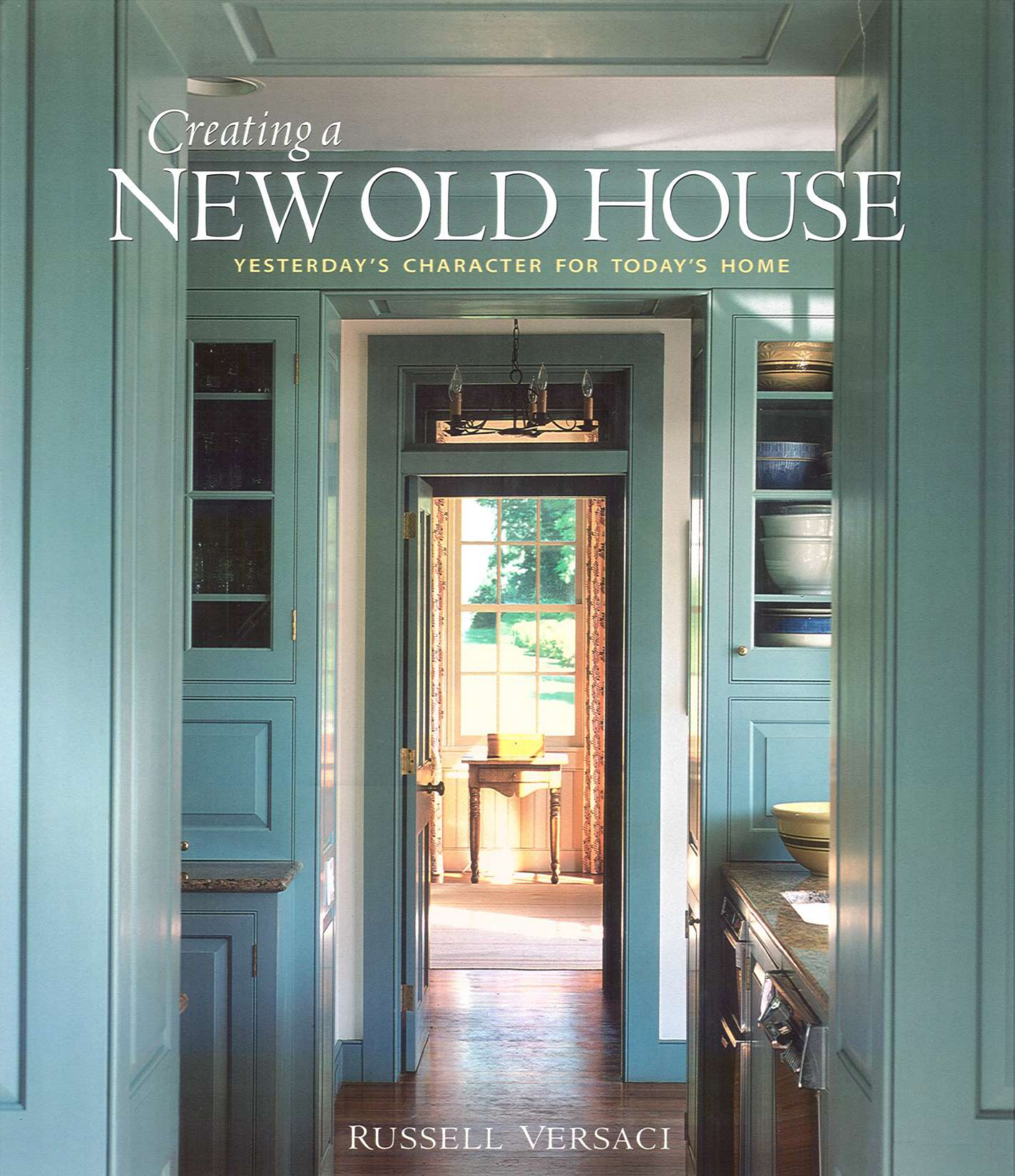


Creating a NEW OLD HOUSE

YESTERDAY'S CHARACTER FOR TODAY'S HOME

RUSSELL VERSACI

A NEW FARMSTEAD WITH A PAST

Antique farmhouses are patchwork structures with layers of renovations and additions, each one telling a tale about how the place grew from generation to generation. Houses became enlarged to accommodate growing families, each addition recording a chapter in the history of American farm life.

In this new old Pennsylvania Dutch farmhouse, the floors are old oak barn boards of random widths that were lightly sanded to reveal mottled shades of caramel to black. Floors were then finished with tung oil and butcher's wax.

The layered-on and aged additions are clearly seen from fields at the back of the house. The house looks as if it had rambling collections of additions that accumulated over many generations. The architect recreated a house with distinct building periods, from an early log cabin that extended into a stone house, followed by a clapboard addition and a carriage barn. Formed in a cluster, one part is attached to the next in a growing chain of additions.

This farmhouse, built in Pennsylvania, is a new home created to look like a sturdy, rambling farmstead that changed its shape over time to incorporate shifting family needs. Built in sections of log, stone, and clapboard, the house shares the traditions of the eighteenth-century farmhouses that populate the surrounding Brandywine Valley.

The new farmhouse sits on a fold in the land halfway down the hill, situated much like the Pennsylvania Dutch farmers would have done. Rather than building their houses on the highest ground, the early settlers placed them facing south and banked them into a hillside. A mid-slope setting was a practical decision, chosen to take advantage of the warmth of the southern sun and the protection from the north winds offered by the crest of a hill.

Architect Peter Zimmerman studied the ways the old local houses evolved and added these architectural forms in layers to convey the look and feel of a house rich with history. The house is made of logs and fieldstone, *Crafted with Natural Materials*, and assembled in ways the old and frugal German builders and craftsmen would have used. Markings of recent renovations were built into the additions to create the perception that the home is still being remodeled, even after all these years, showing how a new old house can *Incorporate Modern Conveniences*.

A RAMBLING TALE

The new old farmhouse looks cobbled together from many parts—a rambling stone house pieced together with generations of additions. One end of the stone house is joined to a log cabin and the other is attached to a smaller stone wing and a wood clapboard addition. Peter created the new house around the history of authentic Pennsylvania Dutch farmsteads.

The tale of the farmstead begins with a family of German settlers who built a log house on their eighteenth-century land grant. Although the story is make believe, it appears that a fire destroyed one end of the log house, and the farmers decided to rebuild

hallmarks of style

PENNSYLVANIA DUTCH FARMSTEAD

German immigrants to Pennsylvania in the late seventeenth century, known today as the Pennsylvania Dutch, turned the fertile crescent of land west of Philadelphia into productive farmsteads. They first built houses of logs on their newly cleared croplands. Later, they erected permanent houses using stones gathered from the fields and traditional building skills they brought from their homeland.

Massive stone walls were built 2 ft. thick by laying together sturdy fieldstones. Peeled oak logs were used for floor beams and roof rafters, with rough-sawn planks for floors and partition walls. The roofs were covered with split-oak shingles. The interior stone walls were finished with lime plaster and were kept looking clean with periodic coats of whitewash.

As generations passed, the frugal German settlers expanded their farmhouses by adding on new wings rather than by rebuilding, creating the picturesque structures made of log and stone additions that we see today.

by adding a larger stone house onto the burned end. Still later, the fictional history goes, a stone wing was added with a new front entrance door and porch. Then a clapboard wing and a carriage barn were built to complete the fictional changes.

The carriage barn garage is attached to the log house by a covered walkway. Built of stone and clapboard, the building has a turn-of-the-last-century character, because its distinctive out-swinging doors seem originally designed for carriages rather than cars. The garage doesn't overpower the house, since the third bay is designed as a clapboard addition attached to the side of the original stone section. This clever ruse makes the three-car garage look smaller, diminishing its scale in relation to the house.

MAKING A LOG HOUSE

A crescent-shaped covered walk connects the carriage barn to the log wing of the house. Built of salvaged antique timbers, the log wing is the original dwelling in the make-believe story of the farm, although it now looks like a minor addition in the overall plan. Many early German farmsteads in the Brandywine Valley started out as log cabins just like this one. Its walls are V-notched together at the cor-

ARCHITECTURAL DETAILS

EVOLUTION OF THE BREEZEWAY

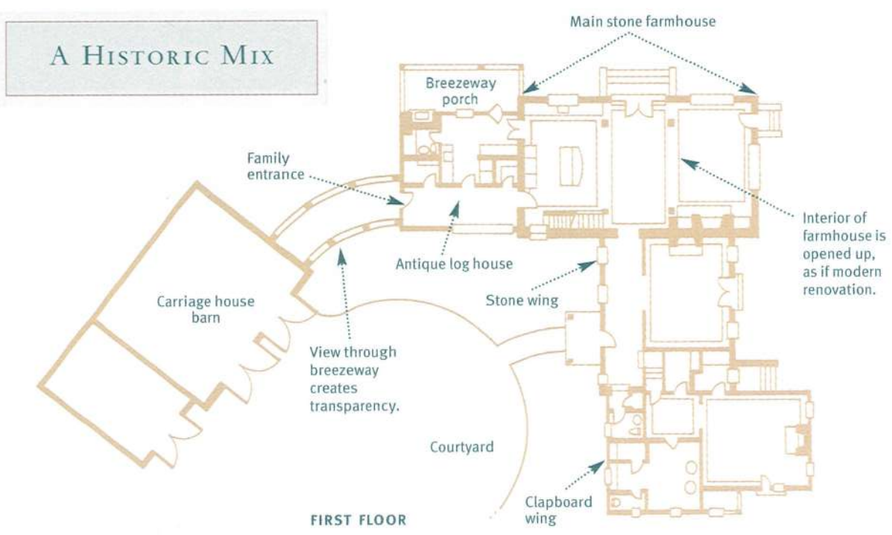
→ The historic model for a breezeway comes from England, where medieval English churchyards had covered walkways between buildings. These covered walkways were made of hewn timber posts that supported a roof structure of beams and rafters framed together in triangles, called trusses. For the new breezeway on this home, the architect used English timber-frame details for the roof trusses.

Although the breezeway that connects the carriage barn to the log house is not a historic feature for a German farmhouse, the version on this house is designed to look like one. The architect *Invented within the Rules* of style to interpret the traditions and materials of the Pennsylvania Dutch style in a new building part. The breezeway seems to fit because it borrows details for its fieldstone base, timber posts, and shingled roof from the architecture of the house.

The open breezeway connects the house to the garage. The heavy timber beams form a series of triangle frames.

At the front of the house, a gravel parking circle is carved out of the slope of the hill and edged with a fieldstone retaining wall. The wings of the house and carriage barn fold around the circle to create a sheltering enclosure; the breezeway helps link the front and back views.

A Historic Mix



The old log timbers of the cabin *are hewn with squared faces, and the spaces between the logs are filled in with white chinking mortar. While the cabin is not a reconstructed old building, rough-sawn ceiling joists stained dark and wide antique oak floorboards make it appear to be vintage.*

The billiard-room mantel wall *is plastered and painted so that every surface is clean and white. Early fieldstone fireboxes, like the one recreated here, were often plastered on the inside to prevent the fire from burning the limestone and mortar joints.*

ners, like Lincoln Logs, and the spaces between are filled with a traditional chinking covered with mortar.

The family entrance door is under the curved breezeway of the log house. Inside the doorway, the rough-hewn log walls are exposed in the entry hall, and antique oak floors strengthen the illusion that this section is truly old. Electrified wall sconces are modified reproductions of colonial-era candle sticks. The log section also has remnants of a pretend old kitchen, which is now used as a pantry, fitted with colonial-style cabinets (to hide appliances) and an old-fashioned ceramic farm sink—pieces of the fictional saga behind this new old house.

THE LOOK OF OLD STONE

The stone house is built of a mixture of limestone and sandstone harvested in the Schuylkill River Valley. Called Chesterfield Blend, the stone mix looks like the tan and iron brown fieldstone that the Pennsylvania Dutch farmers used to build farmhouse walls. As in the German masonry tradition, the irregular stones are fitted together in random courses, like a wall puzzle made of odd shapes, and the joints are filled with a light brown sand mortar.

This traditional stonework is featured on the small stone wing addition, where the formal paneled

The thoughtful layout of the new house is really a fictional story of renovations made to an old farmhouse.

The first floor of the stone house *is opened as one large great room for the living room, dining room, and kitchen. The rough-sawn ceiling timbers have split, or checked, as they dried out, leaving cracks in the faces that look old when saturated with tung oil.*

A massive stone fireplace, 12 ft. across with a mantel-tree beam, *brings the fieldstone inside, anchoring the living room section of the great room. The hearth is made of antique bricks.*

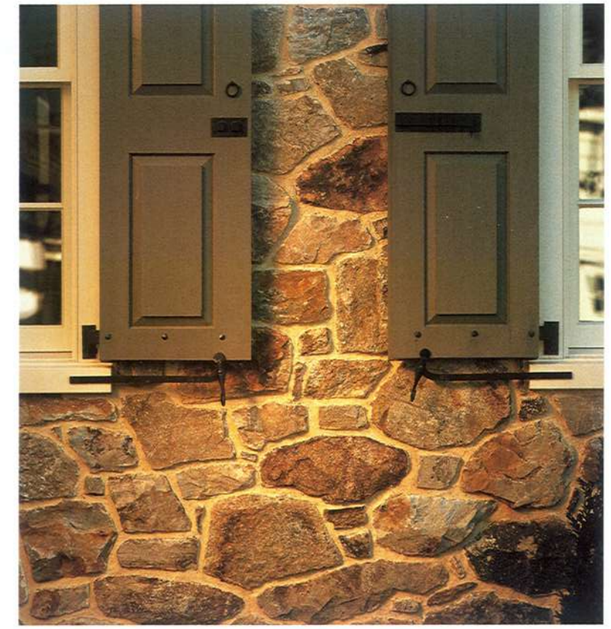
Aging a Stone Wall Today

Among building materials for walls, stone remains one of the most durable, yet expensive, options. A house made of true stone walls is *Built for the Ages,* like the 8-in.-thick stone veneer on this house. But stones must be laid by skilled masons who can fit odd-shaped fieldstones into a pleasing pattern. This handwork takes patience, progress is slow, and it inevitably costs more than simple framing.

The Chesterfield Blend stonework used on the farmhouse is a mixture of Schuylkill River Valley limestone and sandstone blended to simulate classic Pennsylvania fieldstone. A special mortar mixture is used for setting the stones that looks like the weathered lime mortar seen on many old farmhouses, made from white Portland cement and coarse brown construction sand.

The joints between the stones are tuck pointed, or filled with mortar, to make them weathertight and flush with the stone face. To *Create the Patina of Age,* the stones were drenched with a cocktail of aging ingredients called a slurry.

A Slurry Recipe The slurry used is a homegrown concoction that hastens the aging of stone walls in a matter of months, rather than decades. The slurry is a soupy mixture made of buttermilk, mold spores, beer, and a bit of cow manure. The broth is then brushed onto the stonework and left to react with the environment. The ingredients spoil on the walls, turning them tan brown and promoting mildew growth to cultivate a time-weathered look.



On the back wall, where the full shape of the main stone house is visible, the facade is designed with new windows and French doors to look as if it were recently remodeled.

The details of this entrance convey an updated historic makeover, including granite curbstones for the door threshold, antique brick stair platforms, and a pent roof of hand-split shingles with timber brackets.

front door with its transom window fits underneath a covered porch on square wood posts (shown on page 83). The stone and carpentry work are a perfect match for historic colonial details, replicating the window frames and paneled wood shutters that graced early Pennsylvania Dutch farmhouses. As in the story of the house, the architect has taken care to *Detail for Authenticity*.

The back facade of the house is designed to look as if it had been recently remodeled. Groups of new windows and French doors, which capture views of the pastoral landscape, have altered the old-looking stone facade, leaving the telltale marks of an imaginary renovation. Such touches of updating, both inside and out, *Incorporate Modern Conveniences* into this new old farmhouse.

The timber-framed porch, covered by a roof built of hand-split wood shingles, frames views of the bucolic countryside of the Brandywine Valley.