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Balancing Act

TEXT BY LOGAN WARD

PHOTOS BY NANCY EASTER WHITE

A porch addition to an 1810 Virginia Federal knits together new and old.

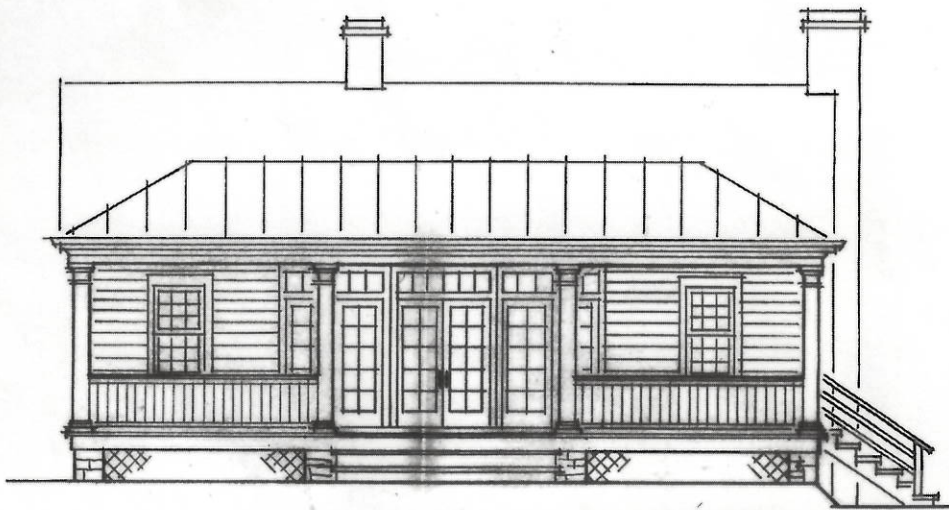


Frazier Associates blends old and new seamlessly in this porch addition on a nineteenth-century farmhouse in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley.

Motor through the rolling hills of Virginia's Shenandoah Valley, and you will see them: two-story red-brick farmhouses with standing-seam metal roofs erected long before the automobile age, some even before the era of rail. Sturdy,

symmetrical, built for the ages by plodding craftsmen, these homes—often rising amid the ruins of crude log cabins built by pioneering forebears—attest to the success of second- and third-generation Valley planters. Jefferson favored

brick, writing that “a country whose buildings are of wood, can never increase in its improvements to any considerable degree.” And in many ways he was right, since the brick houses mostly remain, shaping our image of rural Virginia.



Left Frazier's rendering of the porch addition. *Below* French doors open onto a traditional open air porch. In keeping with the original structure, Frazier added a standing-seam metal roof.

It was just such a house that caught the eye of Bud Flanders and his late wife, Gate, as they explored country roads near the Shenandoah Valley town of Fishersville. Living in New Orleans at the time, the couple bought the property, known as Long Meadow Farm, and eventually moved into the Federal-style home, built in 1810 out of bricks fired on-site and laid in Flemish bond. "The house had not been butchered up," Flanders says. But it needed work to become a comfortable modern-day home, and after living in it to get a feel for the house, the Flanders decided to build an addition.

"The rooms in the house were all good size, but there was no casual space where we could get together with our grandchildren," recalls Flanders. "And as much as I love the look of the front porch," he says, referring to the simple white-painted columns and balustrade that stand out like a smile against the earthy red-brick façade, "it's too small for doing anything."

The couple hired Frazier Associates, an architecture firm in nearby Staunton known for its deft handling of historic buildings. After careful study, the archi-



itects developed a plan to remove a tacked-on rear wing and to add a great room and mud room, totaling 600 square feet, with an attached porch. The space served the couple's contemporary needs but took its design cues from the existing house. "Our approach is contextual," says Kathy Frazier, the firm's principal architect. "When we add on to a historic house, we try to design something that suits its style and character so that it's not a jarring contrast."

The secret, she says, is in the details—all the specific architectural elements that add up to a pleasing whole. The idea isn't necessarily to mimic the original elements, which would result in historical rather than contemporary space, but rather to transfer them in a way that reads new space/old feel.

Take the windows, for example. In the sun-drenched great room, the architects included three windows and clustered three sets of French doors along the wall leading to the porch. "It creates a much bigger glass opening than an 1810 house would have ever had," Frazier says, "but we stuck with the same design vocabulary." They used Marvin doors and nine-over-nine double-sash windows with true divided lights, a close match to those on the original home; they topped the French doors with transom windows (a nod to the original transom over the front door), giving the high-ceilinged room an even airier feel. "Unlike plate-glass, these windows give a visual cue that makes you feel comfortable in the space," says Frazier.

Other details make the interior space a winner as well. The floor is new tongue-in-groove pine, stained to match the rich heart pine floors found throughout the house. Another semicontemporary touch that livens up the room is the wall of built-in shelves and cabinets wrapping around a pair of double-sash windows. The opening to the kitchen is extra wide—a subtle anachronism that improves flow and keeps the cook from feeling so isolated—but its trim details



match those found on the other door frames.

The exterior brick wall is now on the inside, and its original window now peeks from the den into the dining room. Rather than cover the brick with sheetrock or plaster, the architects left the wall exposed, raising the ceiling above the beautiful decorative brick cornice in order to highlight rather than hide the detail.

The sun-catching French doors lead to the new porch, which runs the full length of the addition and spills out into the surrounding gardens. Boasting plenty

Interior details include wood floors, a window seat, and built-in cupboards for storage. The nine-over-nine windows echo the proportions of the original windows.

of space for rockers and occasional tables, the area doesn't masquerade as an original porch—it's length, depth, and location on the rear of the house betray its late-twentieth-century origins—yet it fits the house like a glove, thanks again to traditional detailing. The simple square columns and custom-milled wood balustrade, all painted white, match those on the front porch. The ceiling is painted a traditional sky blue. The gently sloped



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hip roof, clad in standing-seam metal, ties seamlessly to the rear wing's steep-pitched roof.

The new wing is clearly well built, another important factor in wedding new to old. "The craftsmanship of the new should equal what was already there, or it will stick out," says Frazier. The Flanders were lucky enough to find a contractor who understood and respected their old house. "He was patient. That's the main thing," remembers Flanders. "Most contractors are used to building from scratch. Contractors willing to work on old places have to deal with uncertainties."

In the end, one measure of the project's success was how radically it shifted the couple's leisure and entertaining focus to the home's north side. Before, all that stood on that side was a barbed-wire cattle fence. The fence is gone, replaced by lawn and gardens. "The addition gave us our best view. The Blue Ridge Mountains are right out there," Flanders says. "I never will forget shortly after we finished construction—we had a fundraising dinner for a local cultural institution. There was a short rain shower just after we got inside, and the most gorgeous rainbow spread across the valley. Everyone was in awe." **NOH**

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