



OUTSIDE CHAPEL HILL, North Carolina, the farmland is lush but quiet, as it is often shrouded in mist. Its beauty is infused with a deep, almost romantic, sadness, even though a century and a half has passed since the tragedies of the Civil War. When I first visited these rolling hills to see them, my clients, Judy and Larry, talked about orchards, gardens, and retreat. Their son is a chef passionate about local food. Cultivated by this family for less than a year, the property with two ponds already was producing figs, apples, cider, berries, and fish. The neighbor's dairy herd grazed nearby.

How fitting that our early discussions about the house came from surveying the land. I had brought with me Andrew Jackson Downing's book, *Victorian Cottage Residences*, to share his vision and directions for a picturesque farm in the Romantic vein. So many of Downing's principles—accentuating the land's contours, careful construction of views, soft and organic compositions, native plants—still resonate today.

As Judy and Larry absorbed Downing's ideas about landscape, we began to design the residence, which is properly a foil in the landscape. We wondered why there are so few Gothic villas in



**ABOVE:** With flushboard siding, the main block picks up Downing's high style, modeled on British medieval stone manors. Windows are "labelled," meaning they have squared wooden hoodmolds that mimic dripstones in masonry construction. The breezeway is true post-and-beam construction. **TOP LEFT:** A garden trellis matches window sash color on the rear; the garage wing is to the right. **RIGHT:** The view from the master bedroom looks past the entry to the dining area.



## A COTTAGE RESIDENCE with gothic appeal

*The architect tells how a Romantic landscape, and Downing himself, inspired the design of this new cottage residence filled with color and life.*

**BY SANDRA VITZTHUM | PHOTOGRAPHS BY TONY GIAMMARINO**



**LEFT:** The staircase is anchored by a salvaged 1891 newel post. A drab wardrobe sitting forgotten in an antiques store became a colorful accent with a local artist's interpretation of Pre-Raphaelite painting. The rug is from Company C.

**ABOVE:** The dine-in kitchen has a sitting area in the bay window. The cabinet came from Antiques & Interiors in High Point, N.C. The mantelpiece actually hides a television and storage. Chandeliers and the mudroom door are salvage. The sofa is upholstered in Uzbek suzanis from ABC Carpet & Home.

**BELOW:** The understated country entrance has lattice posts and a simple spanning arch made of steel. The owners found a pair of 250-year old Gothic doors with original hardware from a cathedral in England, which had been exported to Lynchburg, Virginia. The heavy lanterns were found on eBay. Antique stick furniture is from the Catskills.

North Carolina...but eventually we found some tucked away in quiet villages. We admired the comfortable relationship of these Gothic cottages with their gardens, and we took delight in their exuberant details. Judy commented that American Gothic feels casual yet dignified, maybe even a little bit wise.

The house is modeled, somewhat, on the frontispiece of another Downing book, *The Architecture of Country Houses*. We gave the H-shaped main house a proper entry

and an expansive back porch. The main house has two wings, one for the master suite and one for the garage. The main house has flushboard siding and label molding (square hoodmolds) over the windows—from high-style or “villa” Downing—while the wings are finished with board-and-batten siding and their windows have hoods or pent roofs over them—from vernacular or “cottage” Downing.

Similarly, the main roof is slate, and the wings have standing-seam

metal roofs. The main house has cusped bargeboards (made of mahogany and marine-grade plywood) with fanciful ogee curves, while the wings have plainer sawn boards at the eaves. Pinnacles, pendants, and other elaborate details of the period don't appear, as this house leans more toward cottage than urban villa.

THE HOUSE at Starberry Farm has a definite character: sleepy in the morning, then abuzz when it's filled with people. The dwelling holds

remarkable artifacts—painted stick furniture and large collage murals, sumptuous chandeliers, and bright rugs. Each piece has a story, and together they bring the house to life. In concert with the fondness for local food, Larry and Judy have a deep commitment to local art.

Visitors to the cottage are welcomed in the front hall, which sets the tone. Beside a salvaged Victorian newel post is the imposing Four Seasons cabinet. It was a drab wardrobe that had sat for months in an antiques





**ABOVE:** With its antique mantelpiece, the daughter's bedroom departs from rusticity. The iron four-poster bed is an antique. **RIGHT:** The "cottage" bedroom has board-and-batten siding and window hoods. **BOTTOM:** The sewing/guest room has space-saving bunks.



**ABOVE:** The master bath is in the house's rustic wing. Beams and flush-boards are primary decoration. A Kohler tub is mounted in a mahogany deck. The antique chair was reupholstered, and the pendant light is from Old California Lantern. **INSET:** The washstand was once a dining-room sideboard. The owner found a Kohler sink that suits the room. Two Thai windows were refitted as mirrors. **LEFT:** The master bedroom features Balinese windows and rich fabrics. Midway down the hall, a salvaged Gothic door opens to the powder room.



## THE ART

Whitewashed board walls—quietly dramatic and alive—provide the perfect backdrop for the eclectic collection, ranging from Louis Icart to Howard Finster, brought together over 20 years. ■ Purchased at local shows or directly from the artists, folk art dominates. Several doors-as-canvas pieces by missionary Mary Proctor depict her as a child with her grandmother’s wise sayings. Paintings of farm life are by Tidewater Virginia artist Danny Doughty. The five-panel “Angels with Mirrors” was created by Paul Flack. In foyer and bedroom, stylized landscapes are a calming counterpoint to the colorful folk art. ■ Judy’s choices, including a lithograph of women quilting hung above a Gee’s Bend quilt, make up a theme of women’s lives. Even his wine cellar boasts abstract oils from Larry’s collection.



**ABOVE:** Lined with shelves and window seats, the den overlooking the pond is more descriptively called the Winter Room. Its mantel (resized for code-compliance with the gas fireplace) came from the Plaza Hotel in New York City. The painting is “Angels with Mirrors,” purchased at the Fearington (N.C) Folk Art Festival. **LEFT:** The living room mixes vintage Uzbekistani wedding clothes (suzanis) with original upholstery on antique pieces and new designer fabrics. **OPPOSITE:** In the kitchen, the AGA cooker is one of the new dual-fuel models. The fancy cabinet is Moroccan; tiles designed by Judy were made in Argentina.



Whitewashed **board walls** tie the kitchen to other rooms. The kitchen extends to include a dining room and sitting area; it is furnished with pieces **classic and exotic**—an enameled AGA cooker, a painted cabinet from Morocco.

store. A local artist painted the panels with a Pre-Raphaelite nod.

Judy wanted a warm, cozy room for use during the winter. The den, which looks over the pond, was fitted with bookshelves and built-in window seats; she calls it the Winter Room. Its mantel was salvaged from the old Plaza Hotel in Manhattan. Salvage was, in fact, used throughout the house: the kitchen ceiling is made of

reclaimed beadboard from the Lucky Strike warehouse in Durham. Beams are from a demolished Vermont farmhouse; they were fumigated after they arrived on site. Flooring throughout the house is chestnut oak salvaged from a Jim Beam warehouse in Kentucky. The newel post in the stair hall, quirky chandeliers, mantelpieces, cabinets, a neoclassical sideboard that became a sink console—all of these

salvaged items add history and surprise to the furnishings. ✦

FOR RESOURCES, SEE P. 67.

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