

TRADITIONAL HOME.

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calm & collected

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Painted clapboard and a tin roof are hallmarks of the Virginia Tidewater region. Opposite: The home's window-filled rear elevation looks down to the Rappahannock River.



far afield

A farmhouse in the Virginia Tidewater is brought into the present with a renovation that retains ties to the land and its past.

BY KRISTINE KENNEDY PHOTOGRAPHY BY GORDON BEALL PRODUCED BY ELIOT NUSBAUM





Left: The study is in the old part of the house, but the bay window is new. The Victorian sofa is a family piece; the gauffered velvet armchairs are reproductions. Regency-style black lacquer chairs with cane seats are pulled up to an Austrian/German antique table. **Above:** Many of the great room's colors were taken from the circa-1915 portrait by Rae Sloan Bredin of the New Hope School, part of the Pennsylvania Impressionists. An old Chinese lacquered coffee table with a weathered patina adds texture. The doorway on the left leads to the music room.



Virginia's Rappahannock River meanders through a region steeped in American history. Captain John Smith explored the river in 1608. The land, largely settled in the 1700s, saw the births of George Washington and Robert E. Lee. The waterway, which long served as a conveyer of people and tobacco between Fredericksburg and the Chesapeake Bay, today retains banks as verdant and filled with wildlife as in Smith's time.

On these banks lies Kendale, a 2,400-acre farm owned by the same family since the 1840s. Generations of births, marriages, and deaths have been observed at the local 18th-century church. So it is with a reverence for history, both past and future, that the owners transformed a late-1800s farmhouse into a family retreat for the new century.

"There was this sense of stewardship about the house and the property that was pretty remarkable to us," says Washington, D.C., architect David Neumann. The clients, whose primary residence is in Washington, hired the architect's firm after they saw a project in a historic landmark district and couldn't determine whether the building was new or old. "They thought we might have the abilities to significantly renovate or expand their house so that it would feel like it has always been there," says Neumann.

The Victorian-era house spent a large portion of its life as a farm manager's house. "It was a workaday house," says Neumann. To update the tired floor plan and interiors, the architect joined a new structure to the old, boosting the original 3,400 square feet to 6,000. The addition's structure maintains the integrity and simplicity of the original house. At the same time, detailing in the original house was enhanced.

Part of the clients' vision for the property included an ambitious landscaping project, so they enlisted the landscape architecture firm Oehme, van Sweden & Associates, nationally known for its bold and dramatic "New American Gardens." Their plan called for surrounding the house with undulating grasses and wildflowers that easily transition into the cultivated plots of soybeans and winter wheat beyond.





Interior designer Frank Babb Randolph designed the great room's centerpiece, an overscale lantern with 3-foot-high glass panes that don't impede the view. Coffered ceilings help define more intimate seating areas. In the bump-out bay, which overlooks the river, furnishings include a custom card table painted in an Italian classical style and mismatched painted chairs.

The screened porch off the kitchen is an ideal place for both dining and bird-watching.



To better orient the house to the sweeping views of the landscape and the river, Neumann included multiple porches, balconies, and bay windows in his architectural plan. The main floor has six exterior doors. "You are always traveling from the interior of the house to the outdoors, through a porch," he says. On top of the house, a belvedere is a good perch from which to spot eagles; it also acts as a thermal chimney. The house is now occupied every weekend, as well as during holidays and summer vacations. Eventually it will be the place where the owners retire.

All members of the family enjoy hosting spend-the-night parties with friends, but there is no formal entertaining. The layout of the new house had to reflect these needs. At the center of the house, near the relocated front door, lies the 600-square-foot great room. Along with the porches, the great room acts as a convivial gathering place. When guests seek private time, they can withdraw to the study or music room. There's no formal dining room; the ample kitchen's breakfast room and adjoining screened porch meet dining needs. Upstairs are five bedroom suites, and in the attic, a bunk room.

Clockwise from top left: A new central staircase is just inside the front door. The newel post from the original house's staircase (now the back stairs) was the template for this one. ■ Moving the front door to the south facade bettered the views for approaching visitors. ■ A 19th-century English pine mantel is a warm focal point amid painted woodwork. Antique insect prints flank the fireplace. ■ Interior designer Frank Babb Randolph (left) and architect David Neumann.



While the house resonates as 1880s, modern architectural liberties were taken in the remodeling. The same is true of the interiors: The homeowners didn't want to be slavishly Victorian. Interior designer Frank Babb Randolph, who did the homeowners' primary residence, helped give the Kendale house a whimsical second-home feel. "This house was all about the comfort of relaxing with friends and family," says Randolph. "We weren't looking for perfection here."

Randolph took the great room's soft, warm color scheme from the Rappahannock's clay banks and the property's





Left: To accommodate multiple cooks, the kitchen measures nearly as large as the great room. Cabinets include furniture-like detailing and are painted in a dove gray distressed finish.

Above: A hutch with a butter-color interior showcases pieces of American pottery (primarily Virginian). Countertops are a creamy French limestone with gray speckles.

autumnal grasses. "I wanted it to be seamless," he says, "so when you walked into the front door, you felt the field beyond." The great room walls are painted light peach, and the waxed heart pine wood floors are topped with custom rugs in tangerine. Playing off this palette, upholstery fabrics range from terra-cotta to pale green. "The fabrics all blend, but the colorations wouldn't be perfect for everyone," he explains.

Randolph avoided overstuffed furniture in favor of a scale more in keeping with Victorian times. This way, seats could be moved around as needed. Case goods have a real mix-and-match quality, including little surprise pieces that might be overlooked in another context. Custom-painted tables are at home near marble-topped family antiques. "It's just classic, comfortable, easy furniture," says the interior designer. A number of quirky accessories—iron obelisks, a cherub with one wing, a floral sofa pillow made from an 80-year-old drapery panel—make for a clever pastiche.

As fetching as the interiors are, the family is more often found outdoors—walking, kayaking, or just sitting. In fact, their rich identification with the land has recently led them to protect the property by granting easements to the Virginia Outdoors Foundation and the Nature Conservancy.

Randolph, who has known the homeowners for 25 years, understands Kendale's appeal. "It's not about the decorating," he says. "It's about a family and why they stayed there." ■

Architect: David Neumann, Versaci Neumann & Partners

Interior designer: Frank Babb Randolph **Kitchen designer:** Nancy Thornett

Landscape architecture: Oehme, van Sweden & Associates

For more information, see the Reader's Resource on page 218.