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SPECIAL: OUR ALABAMA RESTORATION HOUSE



Hands at Work

In a rural Blue Ridge Mountain setting, the handicrafts of local artisans firmly tie a family's second home to the area's heritage

by Philip Morris Photographs by Cheryl Dalton

A second home on an isolated site in the Blue Ridge Mountains became an opportunity for a Greensboro, North Carolina, architect and his clients to engage the handicraft traditions of the area. Wood, stone, metal, and custom finishes have been worked into the architecture to produce a deep sense of regional belonging.

"The couple had clear ideas about the kinds of spaces they wanted, both indoors and out, but they also had an almost poetic sense of how the house should feel," says architect Frank Cheney. "As the crow flies, the site is just a few miles from the Blue Ridge Parkway, so we looked for inspiration in the tradition of buildings handcrafted from local materials," Cheney says.

Settled on a rise in a meadow bordered by woods, the house has wood-shingle exterior walls stained light gray and a deep-sloping, durable-finish, standing-seam metal roof that will weather naturally. Native stone used in chimneys, the foundation, and retaining walls are set in a dry-stacked fashion, with no mortar visible between them. "The house is placed and organized to provide protection from prevailing winds in cold weather and shade in the

Greensboro, North Carolina, architect Frank Cheney designed a house in the Blue Ridge Mountains that echoes the region's tradition of locally handcrafted buildings. The structure and its barnlike garage will weather naturally to fit the rural setting. The house's authentic crafted feel is the result of a professional collaboration: shown left to right, John Mumaw and Tim Hall of Blue Ridge Timberwrights, Frank Cheney, and John Gormley (seated) and Skip Morgan of Willis Woodworks.



SOUTHEAST FOLIO



The couple relied on interior designer Linda Carr of Knight Carr & Company in Greensboro to carry the crafts feel throughout the rooms. In the kitchen, a checker-board floor pattern in contrasting stain was executed by Fe Fi Faux of Greensboro.

warmer months," Cheney explains.

The richness of fine handiwork is in full evidence above the main entry. The gabled porch roof is supported by posts and exposed trusses fabricated from 100-year-old hand-hewn timbers. Tim Hall and John Mumaw of Blue Ridge Timberwrights in Elliston, Virginia, found the material in Pennsylvania and carefully fabricated it to fit Cheney's plans. "These fellows that contractor Benny Harris tracked down were a real find," Cheney says. "The owners of the house didn't want the new appearance of resawn wood, so Hall and Mumaw found antique timbers that would work with only selected cutting and fitting. They skillfully disguised the cuts that they did make so you don't see them. The authentic

mortise and tenon joints and pegging they did in putting the timbers together is quite beautiful."

Floors in the living room are made of chestnut recycled from an old factory in North Carolina. Oak floors in the adjacent kitchen sitting area are distinguished by a diagonal checker-board pattern in contrasting stain that was executed by Fe Fi Faux of Greensboro. Custom cabinets, also made from chestnut, are the work of Willis Woodworks of Willis, Virginia. Kayne & Son Custom Hardware of Candler, North Carolina, created the forged door hardware at the entry, which has stained glass sidelights fashioned by Architectural Concepts of Greensboro.

A standout feature, even amid the uniquely handcrafted environment, is

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STYLING BY LINDA CARR FOR KNIGHT CARR & COMPANY
DESIGN BY LINDA CARR FOR KNIGHT CARR & COMPANY

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To limit the number of new cuts, John Gormley and Skip Morgan of Willis Woodworks carefully selected the 100-year-old hand-hewn timbers used for trusses above the entry, top middle, and in the large living room. They disguised the cuts they did make and used authentic mortise and tenon joints to put the timbers together. A vigorously organic stair rail of twining oak branches and leaves wrought by John Boyd Smith of Savannah stands free like a work of art. The iron hinges and handle on the door were hand-forged by Kayne & Sons Custom Hardware of Candler, North Carolina. Native stone was used for the foundation and chimneys; it was set in a dry-stacked fashion, with mortar behind the stones, not between.

SOUTHEAST FOLIO

the front hall stair rail created by John Boyd Smith of Savannah. "An architect often prefers more controlled expression in craftwork consistent with the overall design, but this is a tour de force," Cheney says of the vigorous, twining composition of oak branches, leaves, and acorns.

Using craftsmen and artisans to enrich and embellish a house makes for a more involved process. "It requires a good deal of coordination," says Cheney. "You can't just order custom handcrafted detail from a catalog. You have to look at samples of work, get sketches or drawings showing what will be done. And it can take a little leap of faith. In the end, I enjoyed the surprises, which were almost always for the better."

There is also a cost premium. For this project, the decorative work, hardware, and millwork cost, on average, about 15 percent more than normal. The timber and stone work were another extra expense, but Cheney and his clients believe it was well worth it for the character it gives the completed house.

The location, an area where traditional crafts have endured and recently prospered, facilitated the process. "It surprised me how these artisans were out in the middle of nowhere and apparently thriving," Cheney says. "It reminds me of what one of my professors at Yale, the celebrated Vincent Scully, once said: 'The crafts didn't fade away during the modern era, they just went out into the country.' "

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