

a *new* shine

The overhaul of this 19th-century farmhouse in rural Vermont is all about light: more windows, higher ceilings, a new sunroom, and luminous color everywhere.

by brian libby *photography by* jim westphalen *produced by* karin lidbeck-brent

1820s

THIS PHOTO: The owners of this historic Georgian house wanted to preserve the original architecture while adding space and contemporary openness, which designer Mitra Samimi helped fashion with a new porch.





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Sometimes choosing paint colors can start a chain reaction. When designer Mitra Samimi signed on to freshen up this 1820s brick farmhouse, the owners merely wanted to spruce up the rural Vermont home with paint and varnish—major renovation would come later.

“The house was already beautiful and charming,” Samimi says. “But it was dark inside, and as we got to talking more about the possibilities this house had, they said, ‘Wait a minute. Why don’t we just take care of it right now?’” Today this National Historic Register-listed structure has been infused with light, color, and spaciousness.

With two children and a third on the way, the homeowners wanted someone to manage the entire design and construction process as well as to select furniture and other interior elements. As the scope of the project grew, they realized they were lucky to have chosen Samimi, who’s also an architect in nearby Bristol. She in turn brought contractor Chris Conner onto the job early in the design process.

Although it was imperative to maintain the integrity of the Georgian design, certain changes were needed to make this a modern home. The pastoral setting offers views of lush farmland and, in the distance, the Adirondacks. But in the 1820s, windows were minimized because of the drafts they brought during New England winters. Despite the surroundings, these small windows resulted in a dark house with unimpressive views.

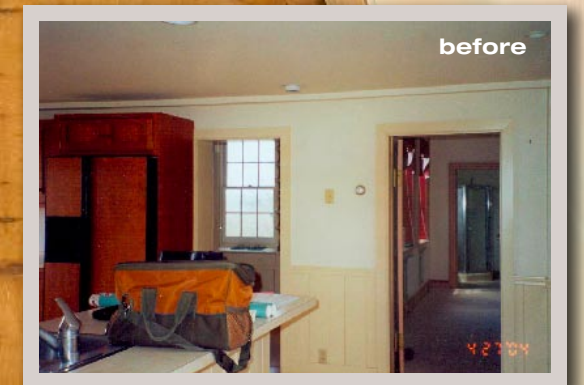


OPPOSITE: Designer Mitra Samimi and builder Chris Conner relax on the new back porch, where large windows and French doors forge a smooth transition between indoor and outdoor spaces. **TOP RIGHT:** A former carriage barn attached to the brick house was expanded to create a bigger kitchen and a mudroom, which is just inside the door. **RIGHT:** Removal of an upstairs attic allowed its natural pine floor to be remilled for a mudroom coat rack. **ABOVE:** The sunroom and porch, both part of the new addition, help the house engage the outdoors. An antique desk turned into a coffee table and an antique end table bring bucolic charm.





LEFT: Samimi worked with the homeowners to select a mixture of new and antique furniture to give the library a relaxed, lived-in feel. **BELOW:** The original window opening had been covered with shelves by a previous owner. Samimi replaced them with a new window. **OPPOSITE:** The newly double-height kitchen allows more storage and better natural light penetration, while exposed brick and wood give the interior a rustic feel to complement the simple farmhouse-white paint.





Given the recent rise of green building and its emphasis on natural light (as well as efficient glass), new windows were an appropriate solution that didn't divert wildly from the architecture. After consulting with an engineer, Conner and Samimi decided to replace roughly 14 square feet of brick with windows. "I wanted to make sure they looked like they were there all the time," Samimi says. "We didn't want something that clashed. It was a nice old farmhouse, but there was this gorgeous westerly view that wasn't being taken advantage of."

To make more room for this growing family, Samimi designed an expansion of a connected carriage barn. The resulting space yielded a bigger kitchen, a mudroom, and a library. A new sunroom is a clever trick on Samimi's part. "It's common for farmhouses to evolve," she says. "If you look at the addition, the columns look like a porch that became a sunroom. But really there was no porch."



KITCHEN REFLECTS HERITAGE

This house was renovated with an emphasis on salvaged, local, and natural materials—especially in the kitchen. "Way back, this space was a barn," designer Mitra Samimi says. "These materials create a bit of romance for the past. The more rustic pieces are really the punctuation on what's mostly a classic traditional design."

Pine removed during the reconstruction of the attic was remilled and used as kitchen trim and flooring. One long stained pine beam, original to the house, runs just above the cupboards, while the original rafters were preserved and left unpainted.

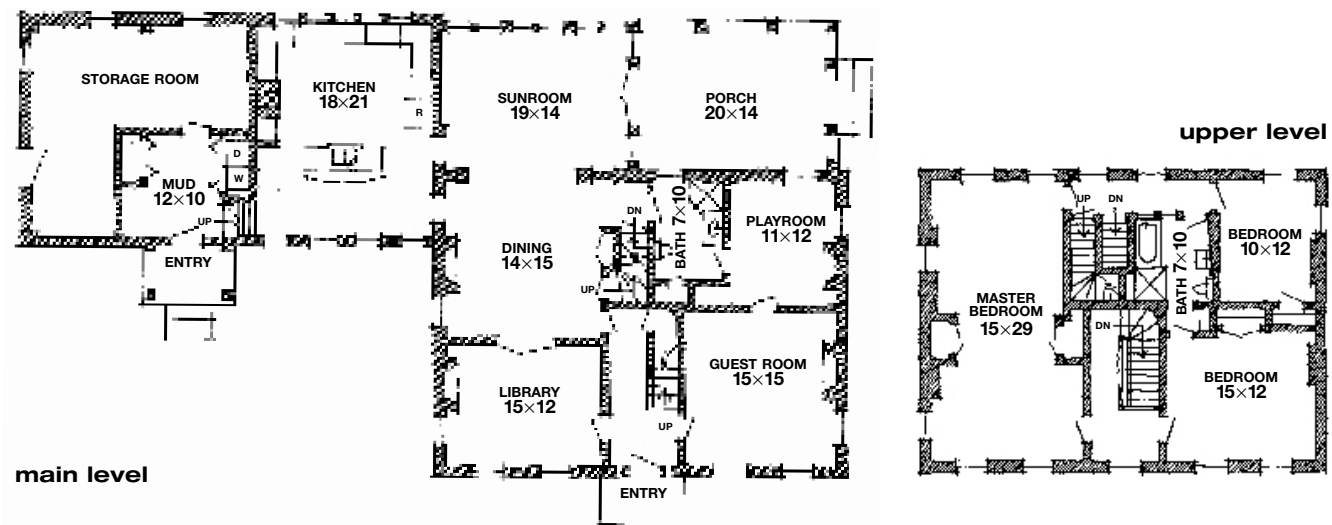
Countertops are honed Vermont slate and butcher block. These textured materials contrast with the creamy white and yellow paint tones that lighten the interior. "They also break up that sterile feeling you typically get when you use all the same materials for countertops and surfaces," Samimi says.



OPPOSITE: A pantry was removed from the original kitchen to create better flow. Green slate and maple butcher block add to the variety of textures. ABOVE: Exposed rafters and a vaulted ceiling hint at the attic space that was incorporated into the kitchen. BELOW: A bench nestled under a bank of windows provides built-in seating and offers a far-reaching view.







main level

upper level

voice of experience

Historic Homes: Do Your Homework

If a home is on the National Register of Historic Places, federal guidelines dictate what changes can be made to the interior and exterior. If the house is in a local historic district, you may need to consider other restrictions. In either case, a commission must approve the plan before work can begin. State or federal tax incentives may be available. Architects who specialize in historic preservation can help guide you through the process.

Before embarking on the new addition, the building team shored up the old foundation and repointed the exterior brickwork. “The existing foundation had, over the years, come apart,” Conner says. Creating a new base also allowed for a raised step at the mudroom entry, above which he built a new awning.

The attic above the kitchen was removed to allow for a double-height ceiling, and a pantry was taken out to improve flow. Wood floors replaced wall-to-wall carpet, and Samimi designed a new lighting scheme, including a series of unadorned but strikingly elegant chandeliers. “I didn’t want to be a slave to historic renovation,” she says. “Do I add recessed lights everywhere? We felt it was appropriate to have modern indirect lighting.”

Then it was time to return to the project’s origin: the walls. Knowing color plays a huge role in light quality, Samimi chose reflective colors. “Vermont winters can be pretty dark and gray, so we needed to really focus on lightening things up,” she says. Samimi devised a new color scheme of off-whites and yellows. “It allows each room to have its own character but still be in harmony with the adjacent rooms,” she says.

Upstairs, a curving staircase divided the space into three small bedrooms and two baths. The new floor

plan merged two small bedrooms into a spacious master. Then Samimi’s design carved two bedrooms from the leftover space.

In choosing furniture, Samimi worked closely with the homeowners to learn their tastes. “At first, they wanted to furnish their home with mostly new furniture,” Samimi says. “They wanted pieces that were comfortable and casual with the undertone of French country design. But after much discussion, we decided that the furniture had to be a mix of old and new.” Antiques were paired with new furniture clad in distressed materials or made with wood salvaged from the house.

The homeowners were happy enough that they’ve rehired Samimi to convert a detached carriage house into a guesthouse. “It’s so fun to be back on board working together again,” Samimi says. “We had great communication, which is key, because I like to think of design as writing a kind of script. My client becomes a design partner, because every story has its own need.” ■

For more information, see Resources on page 116.

PAGES 76-77: The dining room lies in the center of the house but still receives bountiful natural light, a principal goal in the redesign.

OPPOSITE, TOP LEFT: Upstairs, the master bedroom was created by combining two smaller bedrooms. OPPOSITE, TOP RIGHT: Samimi used shades of yellow and off-white to brighten the space. OPPOSITE, BOTTOM RIGHT: The bath includes room for a vintage claw-foot tub. OPPOSITE, BOTTOM LEFT: A new bed complements a collection of local antiques.

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—designer Mitra Samimi

