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**COLORFUL
KIDS' ROOMS**

RAISING the BARN

*On a young family's horse farm outside Philadelphia,
designer Ellen Hamilton elevates the idea of living the rustic life to a new level of
comfort and sophistication*

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Viewed from the woods, the house resembles a mansion on the order of Mount Vernon, with a collection of pavilions, each fashioned from a different material — clapboard, brick, board and batten, plank, wood siding. The dormer windows are actually witty disguises from the living room clerestory.

The exterior of the converted and expanded barn; the facade is sheathed in lime stucco, and the roof is cedar shingles and zinc-and-tin-coated copper. For details, see Resources.



The living room of a house on a horse farm in Chester County, Pennsylvania, by Baltimore architect Fritz Read with interiors by designer Ellen Hamilton. The daybed by Paul Mathieu for Ralph Pucci is covered in a Larsen fabric, the rocking chair is by Thomas Pedersen, the side table is from Property, the circa-1950 candelabra is Danish, and the rug is by Beauvais.

The bed by Ivano Redaelli is dressed in Matteo linens, the Saarinen chair and ottoman are by Knoll, and the floor lamps are from Ikea; the rug is by Albed Rug Company, and the pendant lights are by Molo. For details, see Resources.





The master bedroom's lounger is by Dedon, the side table is by B&B Italia, and the custom rug is by Beauvais.

The couple enlisted an old family friend, Baltimore architect Fritz Read, whose firm specializes in clean-lined designs for universities and cultural institutions. “We are the last of the generalists,” jokes Read, who devised a sensitive adaptation to the old house. The plan was to renovate while the couple, who both work in finance, temporarily moved into a new barn on the property.

But when structural flaws that would have been costly to fix were discovered, the homeowners—by now delighted with the light-filled, loftlike barn where they were nesting—hit the brakes. “We started over,” the wife says. “We had this horrible realization that we were adding on to the wrong house. We thought, Let’s do it right.”

The wife had planned to decorate the interiors herself, even assembling a room-by-room binder filled with tear sheets and teaching herself how to use SketchUp, a 3D-modeling program. Working closely together, she and Read conceived a low-slung addition to the new barn, nestled into the landscape so that it wouldn’t overwhelm the adjacent original house, which now serves as guest quarters. “The husband prefers open, brightly lit spaces,” notes Read. “She likes that too, but she also gravitates toward defined, private spaces that offer protection and closure.”

But before ground was even broken, there was yet another twist of fate. Through a mutual friend, the wife was introduced to Ellen Hamilton, a Manhattan-based interior designer. They got to talking, and when Hamilton shared her portfolio of work, they clicked. “She has the ability to listen,” the wife says. “Her projects were extremely elaborate and layered. The architect was encouraging me to do the interiors alone, but I didn’t have the time or resources.” Read adds: “I went from being terribly skeptical of working with a designer to becoming Ellen’s biggest fan.”

It’s no wonder. For years, Hamilton had worked as a designer for architectural firms, including Peter Marino and Fox & Fowle, before striking out on her own. She is a decorative-arts fanatic who has fashioned everything from an urban apartment with a Renaissance feel to a Thai-inspired Miami Beach penthouse. “I knew we weren’t going to do ‘ye olde farmhouse,’” says Hamilton. “The warmth and modernism of Scandinavian design seemed perfect.”

The challenge, of course, was to invest new construction with a sense of intimacy. Influenced by the Amish way of barn raising, the architect employed traditional joinery techniques to install a beautiful beamed canopy, made with locally sourced reclaimed timber, that encompasses the downstairs living area and upstairs master bedroom. This frame provides structure to the voluminous spaces—a handsome box to contain the furniture. Hamilton’s decor brings in the life. Her approach: “Big with small, hard with soft—that’s design.”

The wife’s directive was just as simple. “The house needs to be sanguine, comfortable, and durable,” she recalls telling her designer. “I wanted warmth and coziness with natural materials and textures, but I don’t like pattern.” So there are shearing rugs and nubby carpets underfoot, and acres of linen, raw silk, and canvas to soften the expanses of floor-to-ceiling glass. Milk paint gives the walls some patina. Cloud-shaped light fixtures float playfully above the master bed. When an exquisite Italian tub for the master bathroom still hadn’t arrived on-site eight months after it had been ordered, the couple—by now old hands at switching directions—found a quick replacement. The den, where the kids hang out, is entirely outfitted with outdoor furnishings by Paola Lenti—chic yet easy to wipe off if a cereal bowl tumbles from an armrest.

“I call it ‘narrative decorating’—getting people’s real lives to look like what they want,” says Hamilton of the process. In this case, despite the twists and turns, it ended up happily ever after. “If something gets spilled or broken,” she observes, “it means they are having fun.”



The tub and Kohler sink in the master bath have fittings by Dornbracht, the stool is by Signature Hardware, the pendant light is by Luminaire, and the flooring is travertine.

AS ANYONE WHO HAS BUILT or renovated a home knows, the ability to pivot—in the face of a glitch in plans, construction problems, diverging desires, or even a simple change of heart (which is never simple, of course)—is not just advisable but required for success. For one couple in Pennsylvania horse country, the pivots came at a gallop.

Their Chester County property, a working horse farm situated near one of the country's oldest fox hunts, had authentic Revolutionary-era bones, with a main residence dating back to the late 1700s. But as charming as the Federal-style farmhouse was, it presented challenges for a modern family. Small rooms, low ceilings, and a deficit of windows made sense 240 years ago for protection against the harsh winters, but not now for a busy, high-energy couple with a blended family of four children (plus 11 horses, various chickens, two dogs, and a cat).

They set out to build an addition that would be distinct from the traditional architecture of this rural region. "We were looking

RIGHT: A circa-1600 Jacobean-style games table in the living room; the Poul Kjaerholm chairs are from Fritz Hansen, the walls are lined in rift-cut white oak, and the floors are reclaimed oak. **BELOW:** The living room's sectional is by Flexform, the wood-and-hide chair is from Norway, the curtains are of a Villa Nova fabric, and a shearling rug is layered on top of a rug by Beauvais. **OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:** A circa-1900 French iron bistro set in the garden, which is planted with baptisia, Siberian iris, alliums, and nepeta and framed by a cedar fence. The kitchen's cooktop is by Miele, the hood is by Zephyr, the sink fittings are by Dornbracht, the counters and shelving are of Corian, and the pendant lights are by Horne; the floor is local bluestone, and the walls are painted in All White by Farrow & Ball. In the dining area, the circa-1800 table is American, the chairs are from the Danish Design Store, and the rug is by Beauvais. For details, see Resources.



