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WINTER 1998

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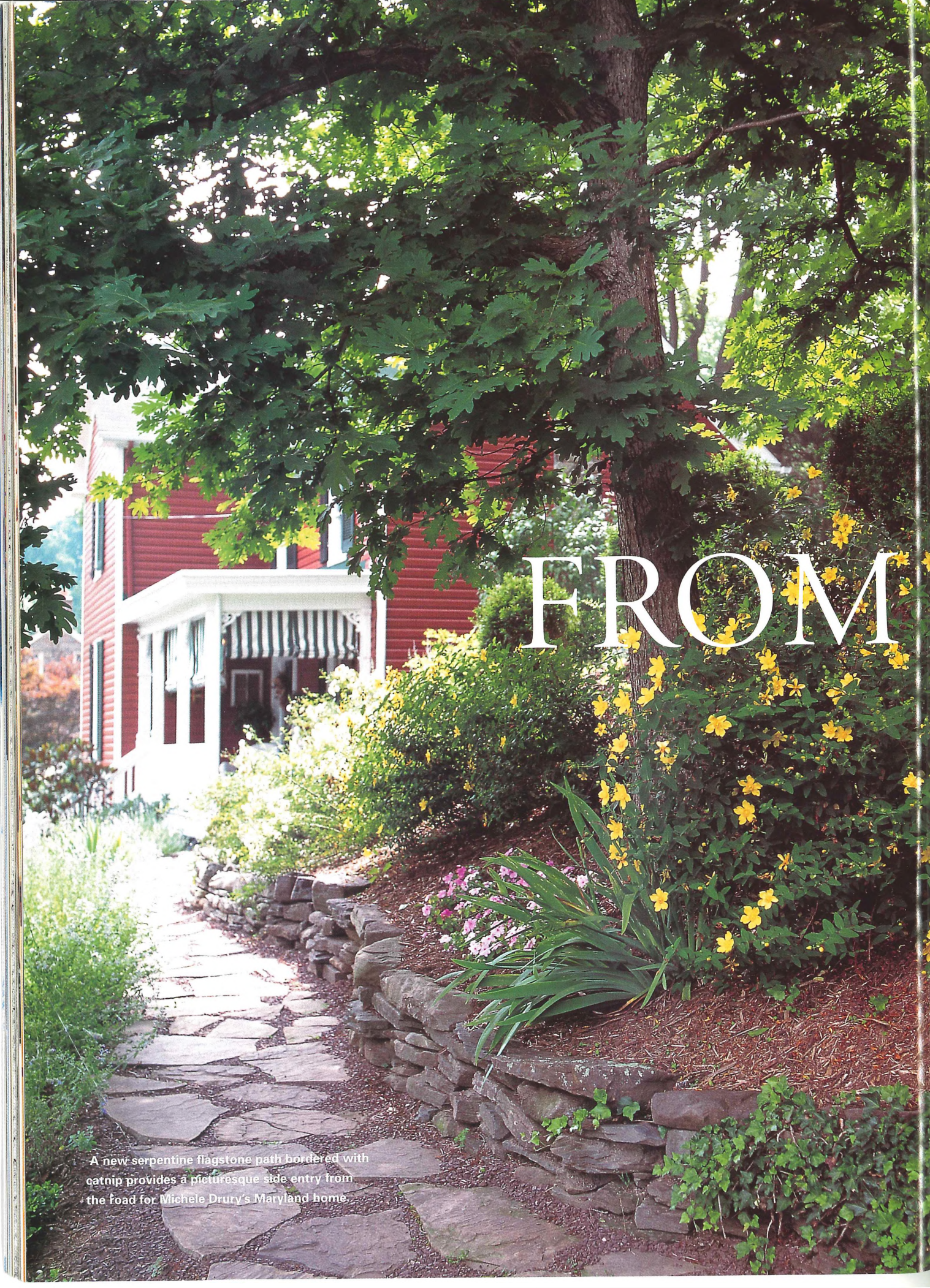
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# FROM

# THE HEART

HE HAD HIS REASONS FOR RENOVATING. SHE HAD HERS. BUT IT CAME DOWN TO THE SAME THING—THIS HUSBAND AND WIFE SIMPLY WANTED TO GIVE EACH OTHER A VERY SPECIAL GIFT. WHEN INTERIOR DESIGNERS LESLIE DRURY AND HIS WIFE, MICHELE, LEARNED THAT LES HAD CANCER, THEY DECIDED THAT THE BEST WAY TO SPEND THEIR REMAINING TIME TOGETHER

WAS TO BUY A BROKEN-DOWN FARMHOUSE AND RENOVATE IT. “WE EACH HAD OUR AGENDAS,” SAYS MICHELE. “FOR LES, IT WAS TO GET ME SETTLED IN MY HOMETOWN WHERE I HAD THE SUPPORT OF FAMILY AND FRIENDS. MY GOAL WAS TO GIVE HIM A PROJECT TO ACCOMPLISH WITH ME—TO KEEP HIM ENTERTAINED.”



A new serpentine flagstone path bordered with catnip provides a picturesque side entry from the road for Michele Drury's Maryland home.

BY CANDACE ORD MANROE PHOTOGRAPHY BY ERIC ROTH PRODUCED BY EILEEN A. DEYMIER

# THE 150-YEAR-OLD FARMHOUSE SEEMED MADE TO ORDER FOR THE DRURYS' TALENTS.

Each regarded the renovation as a gift to the other. And like most good gifts, the project required some sacrifice. It meant leaving behind the urban life they both loved in Washington, D.C., to settle 40 miles north in the small, historic mill town of Ellicott City, Maryland.

The 1830s farmhouse they found there was made to order for their special talents. It suffered from cosmetic deprivation but no serious structural flaws. And a large cosmetic project in the hands of two professional designers—well, all work should be such fun.

Color was the most dramatic, and therapeutic, tool at their disposal.

"I wanted everything as bright and cheerful as possible to keep an upbeat spirit," explains Michele. A palette of red, blue, and green replaced plain white to saturate rooms with vivid color. Sparkling white highlighted the formerly dark moldings and other architectural trims. Outside, red was the magic touch that energized the home's bland white facade.

"I would go downtown and look up on the hill at the house and wonder what color

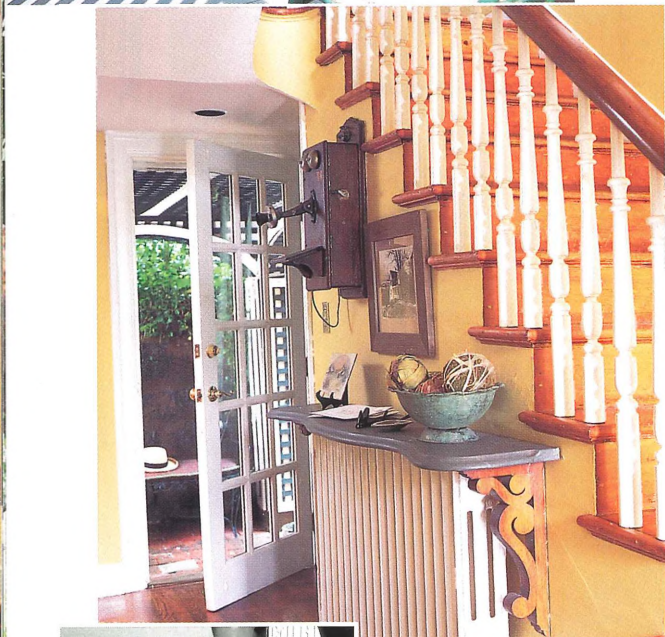
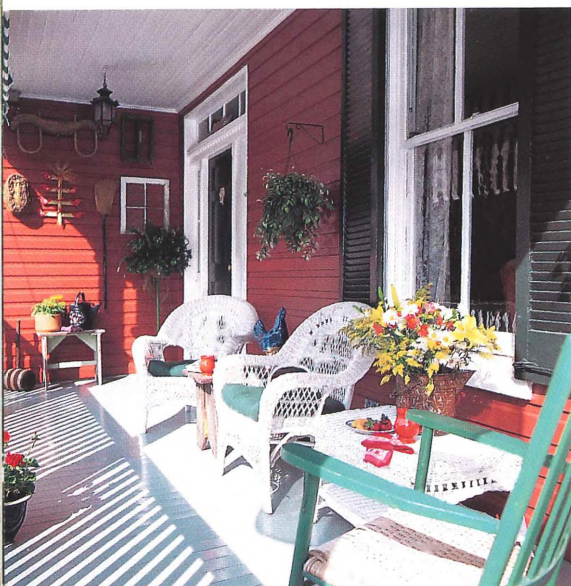
would make the hillside pretty," says Michele. "I love red and decided that in winter, when everything isn't quite so green, red would make the house pop out a little more."

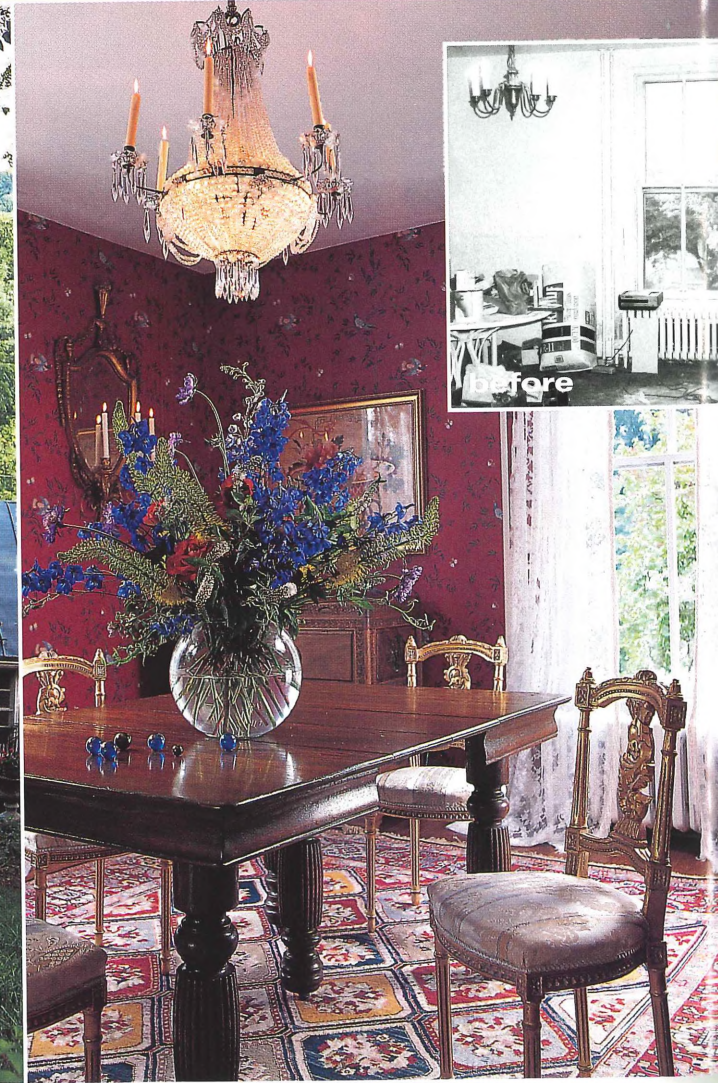
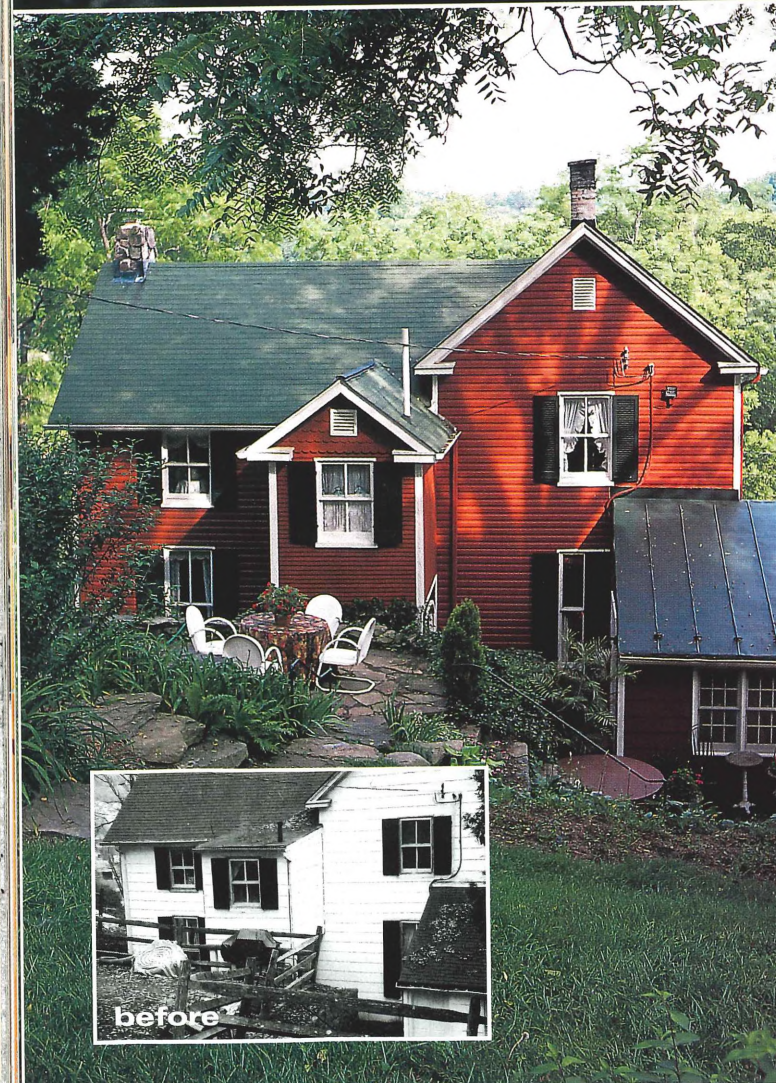
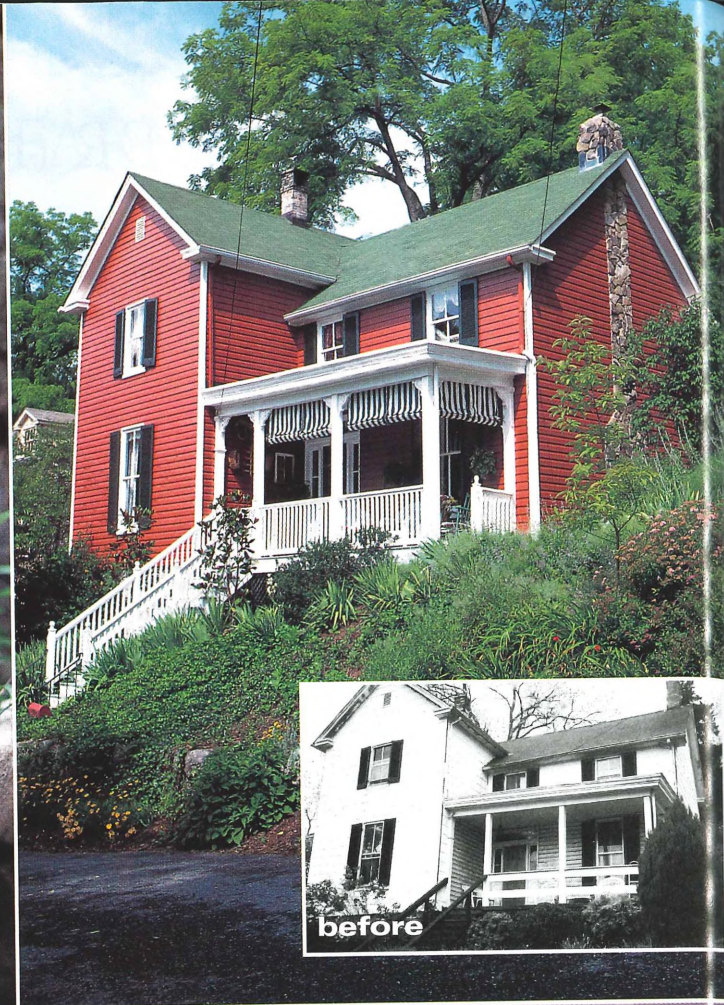
She and Les also reasoned that red might improve the old asbestos siding, which they couldn't afford to replace.

**TOP** Work on the front porch included replacing railings and adding brackets to porch posts. **ABOVE** The removal of asbestos siding revealed a back door that had been covered over with plaster on the interior. A new glass door added desired light in the hall. The radiator has a new shelf life with a marble mantel recycled from the living room fireplace.



Les rebuilt the living room fireplace with an antique marble surround and mantel that inject elegance and contour. Williamsburg green on the walls creates a serene but rich look.

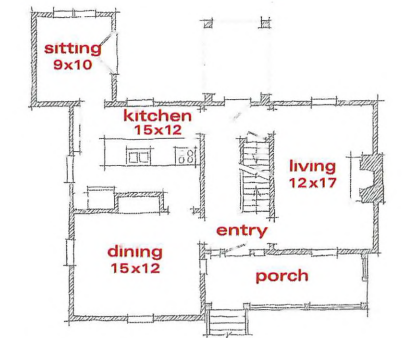




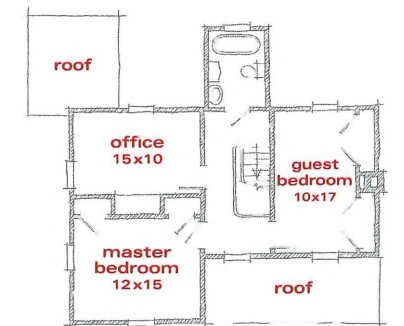
But luck was in their favor. After removing a small portion of it, they discovered beautiful German shiplap siding beneath. They removed all the asbestos without having to replace it with any new siding. "The asbestos turned out to be a blessing because it's what kept the wood siding so well preserved," says Michele.

Removing the asbestos revealed another serendipitous find: a back door. "Les had wanted a door in the back hall because he felt that the house originally would have had one. I said, 'Well, it doesn't have a door now, and it doesn't need another door,'" recalls Michele. But once the asbestos was ripped off and Les's hunch proved right, he immediately ran in the house with a hammer and started chopping away at the plaster. "Voila. We had a door," says Michele.

**ABOVE:** New pine cabinets honor the kitchen's farmhouse roots, a peninsula adds counter space, storage, and a casual dining spot. Michele, left, visits with neighbor Chelsie Clark. **OPPOSITE, TOP LEFT:** The gardens and landscaping were an integral part of the renovation. **TOP RIGHT:** Original German shiplap siding (discovered beneath asbestos) was painted Williamsburg red to improve the look of this 150-year-old house. **BOTTOM LEFT:** A new gable that repeats the larger gable of the ell replaces the shed-style roof of the bathroom, and fresh landscaping integrates the house into its setting. **BOTTOM RIGHT:** Michele loves red, and used it to invigorate the dining room with welcoming warmth.



main level after



upper level after

# RENOVATING THIS FARMHOUSE IS THE BEST TIME LES AND I EVER HAD TOGETHER.

—Michele Drury

Yet exposure wasn't always the answer. Other situations required the opposite approach—a little cover up and camouflage. "The bathroom was undoubtedly the ugliest part of the house," says Michele. Homes in Ellcott City didn't have indoor bathrooms until [the middle of this century], so when they were added, they were just tacked on to the existing houses. Ours had a shed roof and was on stilts.

Rather than remove the stilts and start from the ground up, Les concocted an elaborate cover up of lattice work and arches. This concealed the stilts while also creating a charming outdoor room in its own right, complete with brick floor and outdoor shower. The bathroom's shed roof was replaced with a gable that echoes the gable of the house's ell, and inside, extends the ceiling upward to expand the room's boxy dimensions.

When the bathroom's imposing exhaust pipe proved too costly to move, the couple employed a



**BELOW:** The bath literally got a lift with a new gable roof/ceiling. Beadboard, a soaking tub, and a pedestal sink bespeak farmhouse style, while the chandelier and sconces—gas lanterns turned upside down and adorned with crystal beads—add elegance.



The house's French flavor is especially evident in the blue toile palette of the bedroom. French doors covered in lace camouflage closets created from a narrow alcove.

## Decorative decisions

Decorative insights often can save time and money by preventing mistakes and providing fresh vision during renovation.

**Color.** When concerned that a color may be too bright or intense, consult a chart of historic hues. "Even when doing contemporary design, I always use historic colors," says Michele Drury. "I used them on the farmhouse, not because of its age, but because I knew they would give me the mellow look I was after." **Tip:** By using more than one historic color throughout the home, or in combination on the exterior, you also have assurance that the colors have the same value or intensity and "go together."

**Paint.** Painted-on color hides the proverbial multitude of sins. Use it on floors and doors to disguise imperfections. Rich color, versus a neutral, can improve unlikely surfaces such as old siding, says Michele. Try decorative techniques, such as sponging, to hide flaws on walls.

strategy that became a hallmark of their renovation: Transform an eyesore into architecture. Here, it meant working around the pipe by angling the wall at both ends of the Portuguese soaking tub for a cozy, wraparound effect.

They took the same approach with the house's old radiators, which were augmented with new central air. Michele and Les stamped them with their own brand of adaptive reuse. They topped the most prominent radiator, which sidles up to the entry staircase, with the old marble mantelshelf from the living room fireplace (Les had already replaced it with another antique). Then they flanked the shelf with ornate wooden brackets to adapt the radiator into a one-of-kind console table, convenient for stashing daily mail.

In an oddly shaped guest bedroom, renovation meant striking a balance. First, Les eliminated a small corner closet that made the room awkward. He then created a new closet on the adjacent wall by enclosing an alcove with French doors. For symmetry, an existing closet farther down the wall was enlarged to the same size and also enclosed with French doors. Finally, in a bit of visual trickery, both sets of doors were covered from the inside with lace panels, hiding the "view" beyond and leaving it, instead, to the imagination.

Awkwardness also plagued the kitchen, which demanded the most work and money. "It has three door openings, two low windows with radiators under them, plus a furnace flue. Impossible," says Michele. The question of how to introduce more storage and counter space finally was answered by Michele's twin brother, a builder, who suggested adding a peninsula and pantry wall. With 36-inch wall-hung and base cabinets, the new wall provides both storage and counter space, as does the peninsula. And with barstools pulled up to one side, the peninsula still allows the kitchen to be the hub of the home, a cozy spot for having a meal or just visiting.

Start to finish, the renovation took five months, with most of the time and budget spent on carpentry, painting, and landscaping.

A little more than a year after the home was finished, Les died. "We had worked on other projects together, but nothing that was this much fun," says Michele. "In fact, renovating this farmhouse was the best time that Les and I ever had together." It also was the best gift she could have given—or received. □

FOR MORE INFORMATION, TURN TO THE BUYING GUIDE ON PAGE 126.



With its new doorway to the hall, the back terrace has become a favorite spot. Arches and latticework hide the stilt construction of the second-floor bathroom above (added earlier this century), while creating an outdoor room. A shower and storage are concealed within lattice "legs."