

A bright, classic kitchen with white cabinetry, a wooden island, and a dining table. The kitchen features a white range hood, a stainless steel stove, and a white subway tile backsplash. A wooden island with a thick top and white turned legs sits in the center. In the background, a dining table with dark wood chairs is set with a vase of white flowers and orange juice. The floor is made of dark wood.

Old-House Journal's NEW OLD HOUSE

Building Character in Today's Homes
Winter 2008

Classic Kitchens

PERFECT PANTRIES
CREATE VINTAGE STYLE
SIMPLE FARMHOUSE
SPANISH COLONIAL



This page French doors at the rear of the main hallway lead to a terrace overlooking the lake. Wrought-iron balusters reinforce the simple interplay between black and white in the hallway's décor. *Opposite* The projecting bays on either end of the rear façade of this English-style cottage act like bookends. The sweeping eyebrow dormer in the shingled roof over the terrace, suggestive of a thatched roof, fits in the classic mold of Cotswold-style cottages.

North Carolina Cotswold Cottage



Architect James Collins brings an English sensibility to a new old house in Greensboro, North Carolina.

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This page In the combined living and dining room, the curtains cleverly slide into pockets set behind flat paneled walls with corner bookcases, providing the homeowners with greater light and a more expansive view. The herringbone pattern in the oak floor adds interest and texture. *Opposite* Whether the homeowners are playing bridge or the piano, dining or conversing in comfort, the living/dining room accommodates a variety of activities, much like a grand salon.

In a quiet enclave of Greensboro, North Carolina, nestled along the shoreline of Lake Hamilton, sits an American version of the classic rural English Cotswold cottage. Designed by Greensboro- and New York-based architect James Collins for a local couple, this new dwelling achieves a graceful unity with its surrounding landscape.

Sunlight and shadow play on the silhouette of the three steeply pitched gables, illuminating the rhythmic layering of the shingled roof, dappled in texture. The walls are rough brick with flush mortar joints whitened by limewashed paint, suggestive of old stone. The tall, slender chimneys twist on the diagonal. Reminiscent of thatch, the bell-cast shingled roof over the front entryway and the sweeping eyebrow dormer on the rear façade attest to the decorative vocabulary of an earlier English style.

It took over a decade of persistence for the homeowners to purchase this specific parcel of land. In that time, they built a relationship with builder E. S. "Buck" Nichols and thoughtfully considered design styles appropriate for this site. They had always been partial to certain traditional homes in their native St. Louis, as well as to the picturesque English cottages of famed British Arts and Crafts architect Sir Edwin Lutyens. The homeowners also appreciated the period English and French Norman cottages that became widely popular country

house designs across early-twentieth-century America.

It was perhaps fate that brought them together with architect James Collins, who specializes in the design of traditional buildings and interiors. He is also a scholar and admirer of the Philadelphia architectural firm Mellor, Meigs & Howe, one of the nation's most influential designers of English and French cottage-style homes in the first third of the twentieth century. Collins viewed this house and its lakeside wooded setting together in forming a single design, much as the owners had envisioned it. "My principal goal was to make the house be as integrated with the landscape as it possibly could be," says Collins.

Collins employs outdoor rooms, a pergola, fencing, and brick walls to integrate the interior and exterior spaces. In the flow of rooms throughout the dwelling, he uses few barriers, creating a progression that leads the eye through the house to nature and water beyond. "We had a specific idea of what we wanted, including lots of windows and views of the lake from each room," state the homeowners. The lake side of the house also enjoys a southern exposure.

Since the homeowners had a specific number of rooms and their possible linkages already in mind, the architect faced a challenge with how best to fit their design ideas on a long and narrow site, which was 150 feet at its widest. Among their





This page Dark-stained oak floors in the kitchen anchor the light, airy feeling induced by the all-white marble countertops, subway tile backsplash, and flat paneled cabinetry. *Opposite* Adjacent to the kitchen, the laundry room overlooks the front entry; its sink can be used for hand laundering or for repotting plants.

desires for the first floor were a large combination living room and dining room; a master bedroom, dressing rooms, a bath, and an adjacent study; a kitchen with a small pantry and adjacent family room; a separate home office for her; and a screen porch. To incorporate their goals, the architect designed an H-shaped plan with one-story attachments. “I had to make it into components—like it was an ensemble of one-room-deep rooms, much like a traditional Cotswold cottage,” says Collins. Project architect Yvonne Bartos generated the construction documents for this nearly 5,000-square-foot plan.

For the upstairs, Collins’s design includes a game room surrounded by four guest bedrooms and two baths, all on a separate heating/cooling system for when the owners’ grown children and grandchildren visit. He also designed a detached garage with an artist’s studio.

“What drove the whole design of the building was that the combination living/dining room was so big, it made for such a tall roof line,” says Collins. “One of the challenges was to make the building appear smaller than it really is,” he states, adding that traditional Cotswold cottages are low to the ground. In the gables that the architect uses to break up the steep roof line and attain interior space, the eaves roughly align with the windowsills. “It lowers the roof mass and gives it an intimate feel,” says Collins. “The other challenge was how to create a buffer to the

street. We lowered the site behind the wall of the motor court, which serves as a screen.”

Builder Buck Nichols, who prefers to construct one home at a time, states, “It seems like I’m the only builder around who begs people to build smaller. There’s a fine line between the girth of a home and its cottage feeling.” Nichols adds that a limited budget and a conscious effort by all of the participants helped keep this project a manageable size without sacrificing quality.

“On achieving a sense of scale, it’s also the size of the fenestration that is important,” says Collins, who, in determining appropriate window sizes, consulted an old architectural graphic standard for metal casement windows used on period English cottages. “The goal was to have someone look at it and say, ‘Oh, this house has always been here.’ One thing that can give it away is the fenestration sizes—they are always too small.” For this lakeside home, the casement windows are wooden.

The use of organic materials is a hallmark of Cotswold cottages. The roof is made of pine shingles, as pine resin provides a seal best suited to the region. Inside, quartersawn oak plank floors are used throughout, laid in a textured herringbone pattern in the living/dining room. Richly toned mahogany panels and fireplace surround cast a warm glow in the study. Fitted with great precision, all the woodwork, including the kitchen





Opposite Flooded with sunlight, windows in the master bathroom and master bedroom offer views of the lawn and lake. French doors lead from the bedroom to a private terrace. *This page* A feminine vanity, with marble countertop and art deco touches below, bridges the space between his-and-her dressing rooms in the spacious master suite.





The fence and pergola, custom-designed by architect James Collins, provide a grand enclosure in which the homeowners' Soft-Coated Wheaten Terrier can frolic.

cabinetry, bookcases, door and window casings, wainscoting and chair rails, crown moldings, and baseboards, is custom-made throughout the house.

Working with interior designer Cynthia Schoonover, the homeowners have achieved a feel of what they call "simple elegance." As regular entertainers, the homeowners can host an intimate dinner or even a wedding reception comfortably with this floor plan. "It's a beautiful house, but my kids, including my two-year-old grandchild, don't hesitate to sit anywhere," says one of the homeowners.

Schoonover states that "the homeowners both had a clear view of what they wanted—not something that was elaborate but that was like a home, in character with their own personalities. The house is very restrained. They are very warm people, and the house reflects that in a sophisticated way." Window treatments are simple and elegant, allowing the view to take center stage. One clever feature—the matching bookcase walls in the living room area that are brought forward, allowing the curtains to recess behind them—provides a more open lake view. While the homeowners used their existing family furniture and decorative objects throughout the house, they also relied on Schoonover for upholstery pieces, which she custom-designs and styles; her custom work is especially evident in the

master bedroom and the study.

"Everything becomes art in a white kitchen," says Schoonover. "The style in this kitchen—1930s and 1940s—is very much the style that I've done for years. It is the same with the baths; they all have that timelessness." She adds, "Houses don't need to have a trend. They should be a good reflection of the people living in them, not of the time period."

For this Greensboro couple, the creative process of building a new traditional home was joyful. "We were very fortunate to have such a great team," the homeowners state. "They knew what we wanted and accomplished it all. And we had a builder who really stayed within budget. It is our dream home!"

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Many of the design elements on the front façade fit the decorative vocabulary of an English cottage—the steep pitch of the roofline, the dove-cote in one of the gables, the size of the wooden casement windows, the texture and color of the limewashed bricks, and the bell-cast shingled roof over the front entry.



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