

Sympathetic Addition

Winner: **Rill & Decker Architects, P.C.**



Project: Virginia Horse Farm, The Plains, VA

Architect: Rill & Decker Architects, P.C., Bethesda, MD; Anne Decker, AIA, principal in charge; Jon Reinhard, AIA, architect; Richard Rossi, designer; Daryl Landis, president

General Contractor: Potomac Valley Builders, Bethesda, MA; Gene Davis, superintendent

Seamless Match

When clients from The Plains, VA, came to Rill & Decker Architects, they brought what originally looked like a fairly simple project – the updating of an existing Colonial stone home located on 165 acres of rolling hills in horse-farm country. As the work progressed, however, it became apparent that the scope and scale of the project were significantly larger than most. Ultimately, Bethesda, MD-based Rill & Decker completely gutted and revamped the late-1800s home, adding 6,500 sq.ft. to the existing 8,900 sq.ft. The firm also designed new outdoor pavilions for entertaining and a five-car carriage house. “Our goal was to update the tired look of the house to create a more gracious, grand feeling while capturing panoramic views of the Blue Ridge Mountains,” says Anne Decker, AIA, principal in charge.

The main house portion of the project grew in scale as it went along, as did the outdoor entertaining space and the five-car garage carriage house. “We suggested these later to accommodate large-scale entertaining and fundraising events,” says Decker. “The planning stage was less than a year. The house started out a lot smaller and grew in scale, and we designed as we went along.”

“The challenge was to add considerable space to the main house without creating something that looked monumental in scale,” explains Decker. “We also wanted the new additions to blend seamlessly with the existing structure. We did this by keeping the height of the additions lower than the main house so they wouldn’t dominate the massing of the existing home. Additions were also broken down into simple gabled ‘pavilions’ to complement the five-part front façade. The additions were extended to the side and back of the home, as extrusions of the existing wings, to maintain the overall massing and to camouflage the size.”

Rill & Decker designed the additions to be respectful to the existing home and the surrounding landscape, paying special attention to the massing, rooflines and detailing. The layout reflects the formality of the main body of the house, as the owner entertains a lot and wanted a house that flowed for entertainment.

“One of the goals was to keep the simple approach,” says Decker. “When you approach the house, it looks like a humble stone house from the front. At the back, it takes on a completely different character, spilling to a two-story elevation and exposing itself in a grand gesture to the Blue Ridge Mountains.”

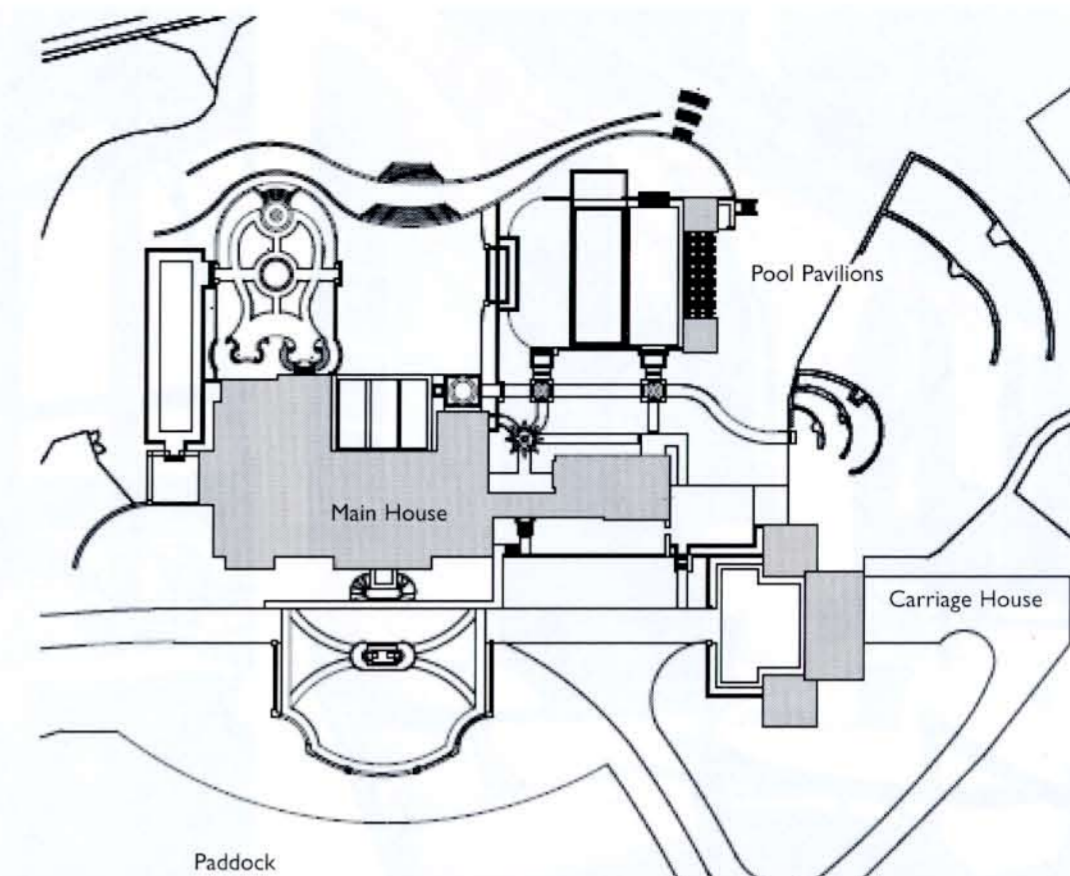
As the firm got into the project, Decker realized she would have to gut the interior of the original home to redesign the spaces and provide new systems. “We demolished the existing house down to the original stone bearing walls and completely redesigned the existing spaces, in some areas lowering the floors and raising the ceilings to create more pleasing proportions,” she says.

The house is based on the five-part Palladian plan with the entry foyer on the second floor leading to the living room. The wings to the north and south provide private quarters – the north wing houses children’s bedrooms, while the south wing houses the master suite. “We more than doubled the size of the master suite in the south wing and remodeled and expanded the bedrooms and bathrooms in the north wing,” says Decker. “In the main portion of the house, we added a one-story gallery space with an upper-level living room terrace that opens up to the views.”



The Salamander House, a late-1800s Colonial stone home located on a 165-acre horse farm in The Plains, VA, has been expanded and updated by Rill & Decker Architects, who doubled the size of the manor home and added new outbuildings. All photos: Gordon Beall Photography unless otherwise noted

Rill & Decker added 6,500 sq.ft. to the existing 8,900-sq.ft. house, and added two outdoor entertainment pavilions and a five-car garage carriage house. Site plan: courtesy of Rill & Decker Architects, P.C.



In the kitchen area, Decker lowered the floors to increase the ceiling height. “The original ceiling height was a claustrophobic seven ft., so we changed it to nine ft. by lowering the floors,” she says. “We also added a one-story breakfast room with panoramic views.”

The two-story home now features the living room and entry hall on the main floor, along with the expanded master suite and the children’s bedroom areas. Large terraces off the living room and the master bedroom invite people outdoors. The lower level has also been expanded; it includes two game rooms, a media room, a billiard room, a wine cellar and mechanical rooms in the south wing under the master bedroom. In the center area are the formal dining room and a cocktail room. The renovated kitchen and the new breakfast room are in the north wing, along with a guest house under one of the children’s bedrooms.

One of the problems with the original home was that it was dark and inward facing. The redesigned spaces are more outward looking to take advantage of the views of the farm and the mountains beyond. Another challenge was matching the stone that was used for the additions. The original house had been built of fieldstone and granite that was no longer available. Bethesda-based Potomac Valley Builders, which also built two of the owner’s previous residences, went to quarries throughout the East Coast looking for a match. While they were not able to get the same stone, they were able to find a fieldstone blend that was a “seamless match,” according to Decker. “It matches the stone color, shape and size and it has a finish that replicates 70 years of weathering.” Luck Stone of Sterling, VA, supplied the fieldstone.

A number of other suppliers also contributed to the success of the project. E.A. Hagberg Millwork of Sugar Grove, PA, did the millwork; wrought-iron work was done by Windy Hill Forge of Warrenton, VA; Tradewood Windows & Doors of St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada, supplied the windows and doors; Rugo Stone of Lorton, VA, supplied the Harvest Gold sandstone kitchen countertops as well as the outdoor kitchen hood; the graduated Buckingham slate roof was the work of The Roof Center of Manassas, VA; and tile and plumbing work was done by Waterworks of Washington, DC.

The landscape design was done by Lila Fendrick Landscape Design of Chevy Chase, MD. “Her hardscape and softscape design beautifully transition the house into the landscape,” says Decker.

When it came to designing the outdoor pavilions, the architects followed the influences of the main house. Two new pavilions, one for dining and one for cooking, add 1,150 sq.ft. of outdoor living space. They are located in the rear of the house, accessible from the kitchen in the north wing of the main house. “In keeping with the integrity of the farm setting, the dining trellis and its supporting structures speak to outbuildings and support structures often found on historic manor farms,” says Decker. “These were designed as outbuildings,” she adds, noting



To keep the historical appearance of the home, additions were located at the rear, maintaining the simple front façade; the landscape designer, Lila Fendrick, added a Classically styled fountain.



This overall view of the rear of the house from the pool reveals the expansiveness of the home, with the children’s bedroom and loggia at the left, the formal center portion of the home and then the master suite with the colonnaded terrace.



The pool flanks the outdoor dining area, which is anchored on each end by small pavilions featuring arched openings; they are built of matching stone to coordinate with the main house.



The dining pavilion and the outdoor cooking pavilion flanking were designed for clients who enjoy entertaining. The area allows expansive views of the farm and Blue Ridge Mountains.

that Rill & Decker incorporated features such as gothic French doors, stone and arched openings to coordinate with the main house.

Also new is a carriage house that includes a four-bay garage with a bank barn below. "It was modeled after an old horse barn found on the farm; we borrowed details, such as a cupola and heart-pine siding, that speak to the old stalls," says Decker, pointing out that it actually accommodates five vehicles, four in the garage and one in the "look-through." The building also houses an office and mechanical equipment for the main house.

The house was originally known as the Salamander House, a name given to it by the second owner, a World War I hero, attorney and former

governor of Rhode Island. It was a code name given to him by a resistance group because the salamander represents courage and fortitude. The previous owner had changed the name, but the current owner has taken it back and the Salamander House is now ready for a bright, new future that is built on its past. — *Martha McDonald*

WEB ONLY: For a list of suppliers for this project, go to www.period-homes.com/extras/DeckerSuppliers.htm; for additional photographs, go to www.period-homes.com/extras/July09Decker.htm



Above: The new kitchen with 9-ft. ceilings replaces a former dark kitchen that had 7-ft. ceilings. Rill & Decker custom designed the kitchen cabinetry and added a breakfast room with panoramic views.

Left: The renovated living room features paneled walls, a fireplace and molding designed to give the illusion of height. Previously, the house had been dark and inward facing (inset) but the renovation added light and views throughout.