

Two Structures, Two Treatments

A restored farmhouse receives a regionally inspired addition



BEST REMODEL

The commitment of architect Nicole Migeon and builder Chris Seaver to honorably restore a late 18th-century house and add to it in the form of a barn-inspired gathering space made it a pleasure to give them this year's Best Remodel Award. The poor condition of the original house and the complexity of the new build made the three-year-long project a demanding effort and hard-earned triumph.

BY NICOLE MIGEON

Located on a river in western Massachusetts, this 1785 Federal-style home has been in my firm's charge for more than three years. The clients bought the property with the intention of restoring the original portion of the house and replacing a decrepit existing addition. This was accomplished in two phases, beginning with the historic structure. Given the old home's small rooms and low ceilings, we agreed it would be used for more private activities like sleeping and reading, whereas the addition would house an open-concept space for socializing and allow for easy access to the outdoors. Our plan was to restore or replicate the details and materials in the farmhouse where we could, and build an addition with natural, durable, and sustainable materials.

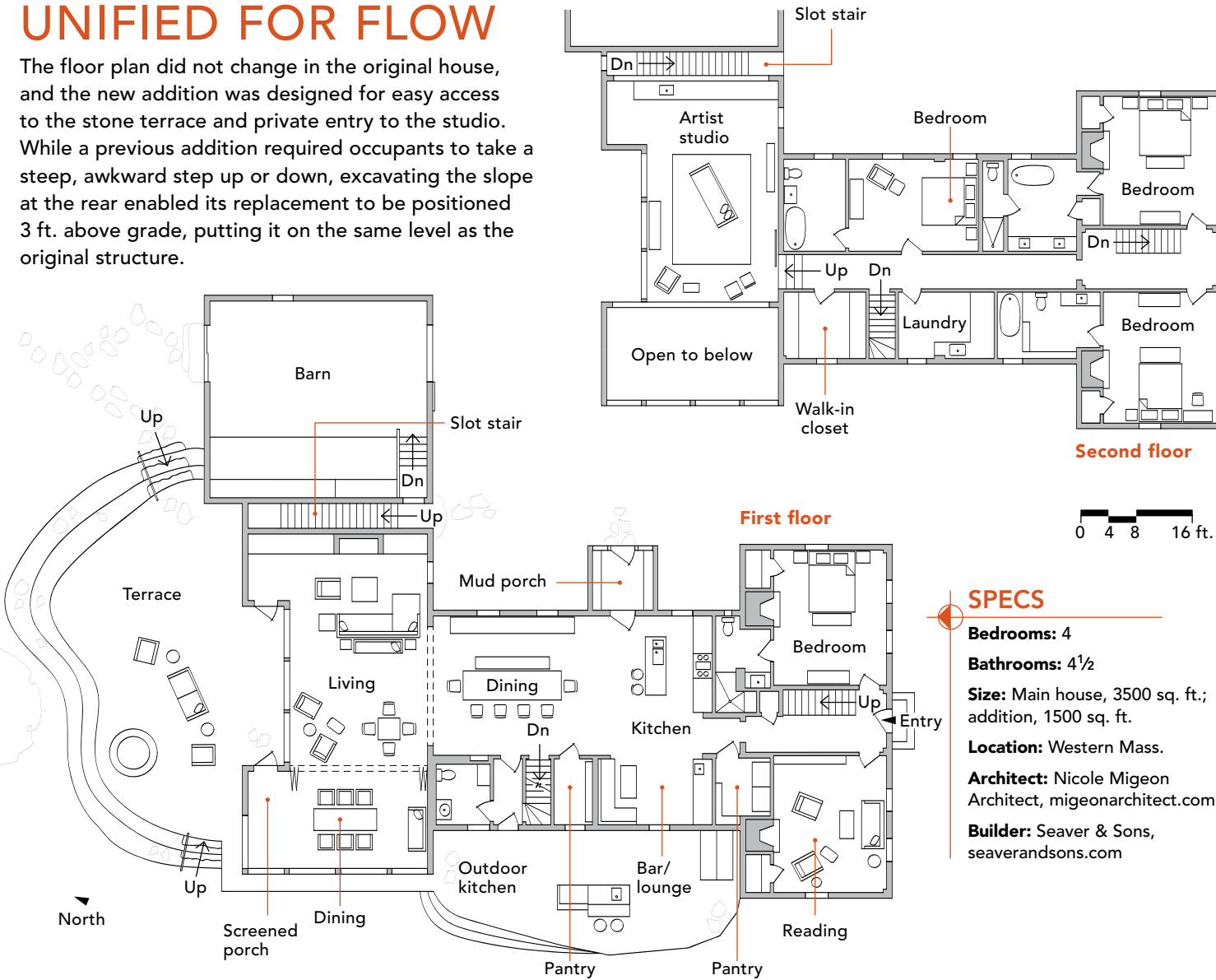
I think designing and engineering the trusses in the new guesthouse, as well as the screening assembly and slot stair, were the most gratifying aspects of the build. And, of course, anytime you are restoring or renovating a period home, there are unanticipated hurdles and creative opportunities that require a good team. The builder, Chris Seaver, and I worked with several local craftspeople and artisans. I attribute the high



Restoration motivation. After years spent admiring this 18th-century house, the clients purchased the property, and have retained the original structure's facade.

UNIFIED FOR FLOW

The floor plan did not change in the original house, and the new addition was designed for easy access to the stone terrace and private entry to the studio. While a previous addition required occupants to take a steep, awkward step up or down, excavating the slope at the rear enabled its replacement to be positioned 3 ft. above grade, putting it on the same level as the original structure.



SPECS

Bedrooms: 4

Bathrooms: 4½

Size: Main house, 3500 sq. ft.; addition, 1500 sq. ft.

Location: Western Mass.

Architect: Nicole Migeon Architect, migeonarchitect.com

Builder: Seaver & Sons, seaverandsons.com



Shifty sideboard. To disguise the sag of the 230-year-old floor—nearly 3 in. out of level in a span of 15 ft.—the builder made a base with different-length legs. The gap between the bottom rail and floor varies along the length of the piece, but because the shadowline masks the incremental height differences, the eye doesn't pick up on it.



Strategic arrangement. The kitchen is divided into separate but connected rooms and storage areas. There's a central main space, which is devoid of large appliances, as well as a lounge/bar area with seating, a full-size pantry that houses a fridge and freezer, and a dry-goods pantry.



A space to create. The orientation of the building maximizes desirable northern light in the artist's studio, where the intricacies of the trusswork (see "Customizing trusses," p. 64) are on full display.



Rustic respite. LVLs wrapped in chestnut warm the partially conditioned interiors, which are separated from the screened porch by a NanaWall that disappears from view when open.

level of design and construction details on this project to their care and expertise.

Back from the brink

In the existing house, we restored where we could and renovated where we had to. The entire framing structure and the floors were in exceptionally bad shape—everything needed reinforcing, and the roof was a complete redo. Plus, the siding was full of rot. In short, it was a near-total gut job.

We decided not to change the floor plan, and started by removing all of the features that were not part of the original house. We salvaged materials when possible, including the wood-plank floors, the plaster walls and ceilings, some moldings, and the stone fireplace mantels and hearths. The original roof was slate, but we wanted the house and addition to relate, so we went with standing-seam zinc on both. All of the windows were damaged and replaced with historical replicas by Marvin—the new wood-divided lites match the size and scale of the originals. We also restored the glass transom above the entry door. Custom casings, moldings, and baseboards were milled locally—again to rep-

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Inspired addition

A previous addition had been tacked onto the rear of the original building—it was dark, dank, and full of mold. It was an easy decision to demolish it to make way for a guesthouse and an artist's studio. The clients love old New England barns, which inspired the new building's form. To come up with a design, we studied hay and tobacco barns, which are common in the area.

The placement of the 1500-sq.-ft. slab-on-grade structure was something of a head-scratcher out of the gate. Originally we thought to position the addition on the other side of the house so as not to repeat what had been done previously. We did ultimately add to the rear of the house, which is more in line with what would have been done traditionally, but in a different orientation than that of the previous addition.

Addressing natural elements

The site's topography influenced the design too. Runoff water and heavy snow loads were major considerations, complicated by a steep slope at the

CUSTOMIZING TRUSSES

After the rough truss framing went up, the builder wrapped every surface with the highest-grade quartersawn clear Douglas fir, chosen for its consistent grain.

He used 3/4-in.-thick 1x12s for the finish wood—ripping miters at every corner—to create the look of solid timber and left an 1/8-in. gap on each side of the trusses for expansion/contraction to protect the mitered corners from popping apart with humidity.

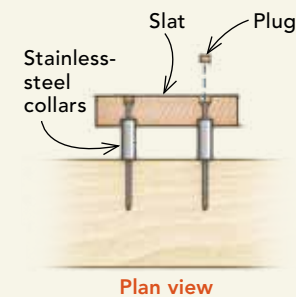
The trusswork includes two webs infilled with glass to separate the conditioned space from the unconditioned screened porch (see p. 63, top photo). The glass was cut to be sandwiched between the finished trusses.

The same approach was used on the opposite end of the room, with the added complication of a chimney running through the assembly.



ATTACHING VERTICAL SLATS

The bandsawn 1x5 clear red cedar vertical boards on the new addition are a reference to the region's tobacco barns, which typically have vertical siding with top-hinged vents. Fastening them to the timber structure presented an issue. The original drawing had the boards—some of which



are 24 ft. long—face-screwed to the framing, but there was concern that water would collect in the space between the board-to-board assembly and cause rot. Instead, they used two 1 1/2-in. stainless-steel collars at each point where the boards contact timber to create air space for the assembly to dry out. To make it work, the collars had to be countersunk 1/8 in. into the back side of the slats. To smooth out the finish, the screw holes in the face of each board were filled with cedar plugs.

rear of the house. We chose to excavate to create a more gradual slope, and then raise the building roughly 3 ft. above grade. This was done for two reasons: to protect the structure from moisture and to make the transition from the addition to the existing house an even plane. Excavating also gave us the opportunity to add an elevated stone terrace.

For passive solar control, we designed a three-layer shading system to cover the west-facing gable end. It allows natural light into the screened porch while deflecting heat and glare. Douglas-fir-clad timbers make up the framing structure, insect screening allows for comfortable outdoor living, and vertical slats of reclaimed clear cedar create deep shadowlines, adding texture and depth to the exterior. This wall also features a pulley and rope attached to an upper-level swinging window—a nod to the traditional hay barn.

The eave-side cladding is quartersawn red cedar coated with Cabot bleaching oil, a semitransparent stain with an additive that accelerates the graying process and produces mottled tones. The slats were given the same treatment for contrast with the fir timbers. Multisash Marvin windows with large four-over-four divided-lite transoms were installed on the second floor, while the lower level has 5-ft.-wide by 7-ft.-tall fixed windows with four-lite operable transoms. A lot of thought went into the screening panels and trimwork to make the screens blend well with the windows. In fact, from a distance, the screens look like windows.

Social space rich in detail

Inside, a large entertainment space is divided into separate areas for socializing, watching TV, playing games, and reading. Everything is centered around a custom gas fireplace. A NanaWall makes it possible to open the interior conditioned space to the screened dining porch. Seaver says detailing the ceiling above the main living area was tricky, and required wrapping the partially exposed LVL joists in reclaimed chestnut. When installing the finish wood, he scribed and coped every board abutting the stone chimney and wall. It took two weeks to finish just one section of the ceiling. To give the room the feel of an old milking barn as the clients



Creating a slot stair. A 38-in.-wide “slot” stair in the studio separates an older restored barn from the new structure. Because *Galaxy Schist*, a locally sourced stone, was used for the landings, treads, and risers, the stairs needed to be engineered to handle the added weight. The stairwell is clad in whitewashed tongue-and-groove chestnut finished with rubbed urethane.

requested, the reclaimed chestnut that covers the joists and walls was whitewashed, making for a lighter atmosphere.

All told, the addition warmly supports all of what was outlined in the design program. Architecturally, it is a masterpiece of craftsmanship. □

Nicole Migeon is principal of Nicole Migeon Architect. Photos by Taggart Cojan Sorensen, except where noted.



Nicole Migeon, AIA, ASID, is principal of Nicole Migeon Architect, PLLC (NMA), a full-service, New York-based firm specializing in residential, commercial, hospitality, and spa and salon design. Nicole has practiced architecture and interior design for more than 20 years. She is also a tenured assistant adjunct professor at the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York, teaching design studios and lighting.



Chris Seaver manages Seaver & Sons Custom Builders in Charlemont, Mass. He grew up the son of a custom builder, and attended Hampshire College, where he studied ecological architecture. After completing a certificate program in architecture at the Harvard GSD, Chris obtained his Construction Supervisor's License. He has been designing and building energy-efficient homes and remodeling projects for 30 years.