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A remake that's restrained, respectful and rich

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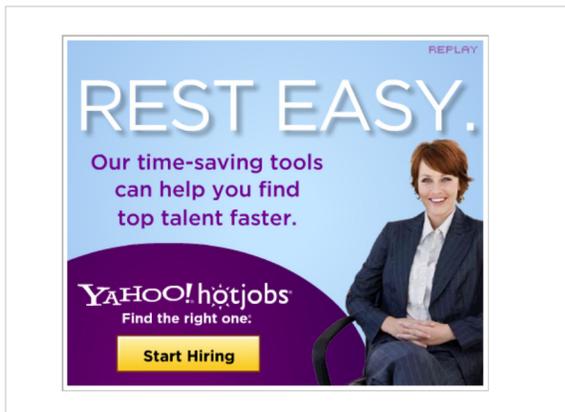
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Home of the Month is a collaborative effort with the N.C. State University College of Design through its Home Environments Design Initiative. Featured homes highlight the benefits of good design and represent the diversity of homes and home renovations designed by North Carolina architects. The goal is to offer inspiration and knowledge that can be applied to your living space.

What is contemporary North Carolina architecture? And what could it be? There is no single answer, but one way to find out is to look at the farm buildings of the past.

North Carolina has no distinctive urban residential type like the Charleston "single" or Baltimore row house, but its rural buildings suggest a type of regional architecture. Chad Everhart is one architect who has been influenced by it.



An assistant professor in the Building Science Program at Appalachian State University in Boone, Everhart grew up in Wilmington. He graduated from the School of Architecture at N.C. State University, where he was influenced by Frank Harmon, a nationally recognized practitioner of regionally appropriate modern design.

Everhart's goal has been to design and build with the common sense of the dairy farmers who settled in Western North Carolina. Earlier in his career, most of Everhart's projects were high-end houses in coastal communities, but when he moved to the mountains, his architectural practice changed. Now he designs mostly smaller houses on modest budgets. He finds this new scale, with its budgetary and size limitations, more stimulating and rewarding.

The biggest challenge he has faced thus far, however, has been the house he designed for himself and his wife.

The couple had wanted to renovate the Depression-era farmhouse they bought west of Boone, but when Everhart opened up the walls, he found that its irregular framing was not up to current standards.

He hired students to help dismantle the house and salvage as much material as possible. With the students, he reframed the house, and with a neighbor, he added siding. The wood framing and sheathing materials were locally harvested and milled. Together, the Everharts completed interior carpentry and finishes. They brought their kitchen cabinets and countertops home from IKEA in the back of a pickup.

Given the extent of demolition, Everhart could have taken the design in any direction. He chose to be respectful of his community by reconstructing the farmhouse roof profile: a main gable with a shed roof on one side. He also respected the "waste-not" ethic, which, along with a very tight budget, guided his design.

Everhart said he found the tight budget liberating. Spending time and effort in the design phase reduced costs later. Buying standard, off-the-shelf products allowed him to focus on solving design and detail problems creatively.

The house is an essay in the richness of ideas and the modesty of materials. Everhart has created a deceptively unassuming structure, with a restrained use of ordinary elements, gracefully detailed. It is rigorous and intelligent – that intelligence is revealed in the thoughtfulness of every decision – without being severe. Everhart credits his wife, April, with tempering his austere aesthetic, and the result is warm and inviting. She was, he claims, the real client.

A revealing contrast

The smaller public rooms (living, dining, kitchen) of the old farmhouse were reconfigured into one large space under the gable. Where this roof framing meets the shed roof of the private part of the house, Everhart exposed the rafters and studs. He used this structural condition as an opportunity to create an interior clerestory, or windowed wall, between the living spaces and the bedrooms, allowing natural light to permeate the house. To maintain acoustical privacy, Everhart used thick, transparent sheets of a plastic between the studs.

These elements, as well as the collar beams, reveal the structure of the house and provide contrast to the continuous white-pine board wall and ceiling surfaces. White pine was also used for the closet doors. This limited palette simplifies the room and, with the open gable, creates an airy, serene interior that belies its small dimensions.

The shed roofs of the bedrooms are also exposed, and there, too, the added height and interior clerestory give the effect of more space. Bump-outs were added for a window seat and concealed pantry, a coat closet and the bathroom vanity and bedroom closet. These additions make a big difference in the usable space of such a modest sized house. So do the new porches, which offer living space and expand the house physically and perceptually. Designed as rooms, they are extensions of the interior. The sheltering walls and operable door provide privacy and prolong seasonal use.

The house is heated by a wood stove, with electric baseboards serving only as backup, and it is naturally ventilated, with no air-conditioning system.

It is a return to the functional and economical size of earlier generations. At the same time, it is a demonstration of contemporary environmental awareness in its size, its purposeful use of local materials and its reuse of the foundation and salvage materials. It is an investment in thought and an example of how much can be done with creativity and care.