

To sketch, perchance to build

A local architect uses an old-fashioned skill to bring new projects to life *By Joe Bargmann*

Jessie Chapman is standing in the shower of her Charlottesville home. She's fully clothed and the water is not running. Architects do this sort of thing when they're trying to give someone an idea of the scale of a particular place. "It really is very comfortable," says Chapman, the co-principal of Goodhouse Design.

At a time when digital rendering has all but taken over the design and architecture fields, Chapman is a diehard believer in the power of sketching as a way to visualize her work. She's on the board of the global nonprofit Urban Sketchers, which has more than 280 chapters in nearly 50 countries. She, like other members, travels widely to connect with and work alongside fellow sketchers.

Chapman was featured in this magazine four years ago, two years before she'd formally joined forces with Peter LaBau—a residential designer who's worked in Charlottesville since 2005—to form Goodhouse (see page 45). The firm has stuck with LaBau's focus on home design and building, and Chapman has brought a new dimension to the practice. As an art history major at Wellesley College, in Massachusetts, she spent her third year in Rome, which sparked her interest in architecture. Her twin passions came together in graduate school at UVA, where she earned masters degrees in architectural history and architecture.

Since then, she has burnished her professional bona fides as an architect, but the sketching has never stopped. Her Instagram feed, @sketchwell, reveals yet another interest: food and drink. She renders with watercolors as well as on an iPad using the Procreate illustration app; the latter allows her to animate her drawings, so they take shape before your very eyes. Regardless of the medium she uses, a sandwich with a side of chips looks delicious, and so does a plate of charcuterie, a scattering of olives, a rosy bunch of radishes, and a pinkish-red negroni.

When we called Chapman to ask her to contribute to *Abode*, she said, "How about my bathroom," and a day later she emailed an iPad rendering that stretched from the sink inside the door all the way back to the shower. When I visited her house to see the room, I gained a deeper appreciation for the artist's eye. The



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A roomy shower anchors the far end of the space; walnut and marble give the vanity a rich look; recycled glass beads comprise the shower floor. Chapman's sketch flattens the long, narrow room into a horizontal perspective.

sketch presented the elements horizontally, in a landscape view, when in reality the bathroom is about 13 feet long and five feet wide.

"I help clients see what a room will look like," she says. "A computer-generated architectural

drawing can be intimidating—everything appears so technical. It has to be, in order for something to be built properly."

But the imagination to see the finished product and the skill render it? That's Chapman's gift.

