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*A mismatched kitchen's
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Being green

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*An inventor's 1980s home
could use some tweaking*

Inside.
Outside.
Home.

Aboode

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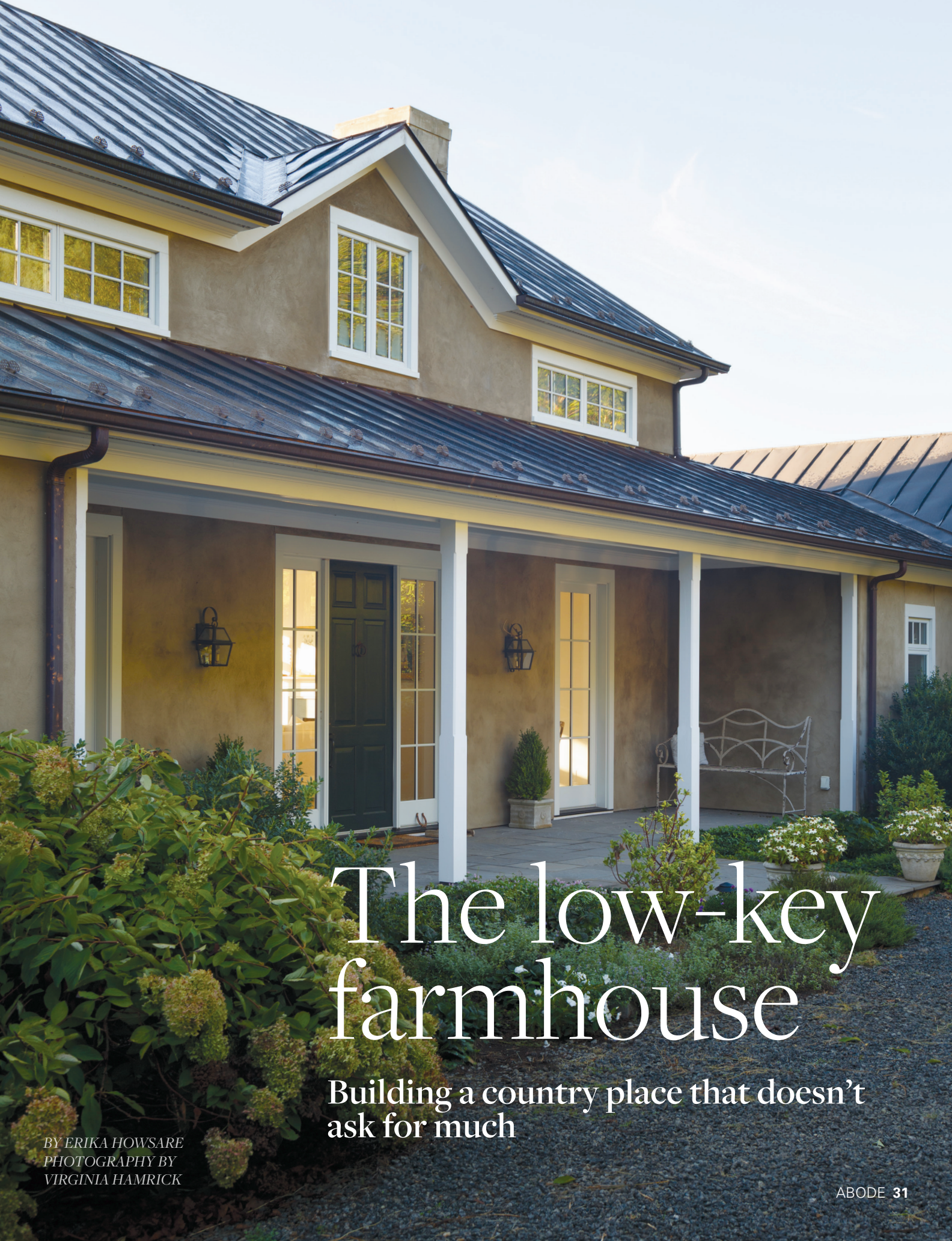
Less isn't
more

Where are all the
local tiny houses?

Modern country

A Free Union farmhouse takes a European form





The low-key farmhouse

Building a country place that doesn't
ask for much

BY ERIKA HOWSARE
PHOTOGRAPHY BY
VIRGINIA HAMRICK

It's a long way from old-town Fredericksburg to the rolling hills of Free Union. But after 20 years in a historic house in that Northern Virginia town, one couple was ready for the country life.

Their four children mostly grown, they relocated to an old farmhouse in Free Union—where she had grown up—and began looking for a house to buy. “None was quite what we wanted,” they remember. When they had a chance to purchase a three-acre lot, they jumped at it, since they didn’t want to manage a large plot of land.

Friends recommended Chris Halstead of 2H Design/Builders, and as the three of them embarked on the design phase, Halstead guided the clients’ ideas toward a working concept for the house.

“We wanted to have some element of the Virginia farmhouse,” says the couple. Yet white clapboard siding was not on the table. “We had the historic house in Fredericksburg, and we were painting all the time,” they say. Beyond that, “We didn’t want something big and white that would be a glaring monstrosity on the hill.”

Instead, Halstead suggested stucco. “It’s pretty permanent, low-maintenance, and you can have it in any color you like,” he says. “The color is through and through; you don’t have to paint it.” The clients chose a muted color, like coffee with cream, that nicely echoes tones in the natural surroundings. A wide front porch and standing-seam metal roof say Virginia, while the stucco—and black metal deck railings—suggest something more European. Indoors, exposed white ceiling beams and plaster in place of dry-wall lend weight and character.

Relatives have remarked that the house resembles a French farmhouse, say the clients: “We like the fact that it turned out that way.”

Creating flow

The couple wanted an open living/dining space with plenty of daylight, and Halstead located this in the house’s central portion, with a symmetrical arrangement of French doors between two banks of three windows. At one end of the long room is a fireplace whose design perfectly encapsulates the quiet feel of the house: minimal soapstone hearth and surround, with traditional but low-key wooden trim and mantel.

These rooms open onto a deck, part of a system of outdoor spaces that wrap around the rear and sides of the house. The clients wanted both a covered porch and a screened porch, but were loathe to lose the unimpeded daylight in the living/dining space. So Halstead located the deck outside those rooms, then placed the covered

and screened porches at either end. “For them, coffee in the morning on the screened porch was a big deal,” he says. Placing that porch off the kitchen meant maximum convenience.

Dividing the outdoor spaces in this way lets each one be its own small world, emphasizing different views of the nearby meadows and distant mountains.

And while the views do enter the house, a visitor doesn’t immediately appreciate the vista upon arrival: From the front entry, the view is of the back of a freestanding bookcase. Only after moving around this obstacle does one gain the sense of space and light offered by the big windows. “You give them a little glimpse of what’s coming and make them work to achieve it,” says Halstead of the entry sequence.

The house’s design makes skillful use of sightlines to increase the feeling of spaciousness without relying on excess square footage. In the master bedroom, large banks of windows on two sides draw the eye out toward the appealing woodsy views, and a calm interior palette of white and light blue create a feeling of serenity. If this modestly sized room were larger, it would begin to compete with the outside; as is, it’s just right.

Easy to live in

The clients needed space for running their home-based consulting business, and although they wanted to live in a fairly compact area on one level, they also needed plenty of room for guests. (Besides their own children, they each have five siblings who sometimes visit.) With that in mind, Halstead designed not only three upstairs bedrooms, but a basement suite that includes a kitchenette.

A standalone office is connected to the mudroom via a breezeway, and could be converted to



a garage if future owners so desired. Halstead surprised his clients with a second small reading room off the master suite. “I put in a little study, giving her a place to read,” he says, “and she’s set that up as her own little office.” His client is delighted: “Like most moms, I’ve usually had a desk in the kitchen. Chris created this space for me and I love it.”

A frequent cook, she also needed a well-designed kitchen with the key elements close together, and an L-shaped layout wrapped around a soapstone-topped island does the trick. “I wanted it not to be part of the living/dining room,” she says. “I had had it the other way, and it drove me crazy when everybody was in the kitchen while I made Thanksgiving dinner.” The kitchen, then, is adjacent to but definitely separate from the other public spaces.

Halstead’s clients praise the speed of the construction process (the house went up in about six months in 2010, thanks to a prefabricated foundation and prebuilt exterior walls) and the performance of their home. It’s well-insulated, thanks to 2x6 walls, cellulose insulation and spray foam in the attic.

It’s also a breeze to care for: The stucco exterior, aluminum exterior windows and Trex decking are low-maintenance materials.

“It’s an easy house to live in,” say the clients. “And there’s no wasted space. We live in all of it.”

THE BREAKDOWN

4,420 square feet (finished), 1,620 square feet (unfinished)

Foundation: Superior Wall System

Structure: 6" panelized wood frame exterior walls; 4" interior partitions; trussed roof frame; truss joist floors

Exterior wall finish: 3/4" three-part cement stucco with painted wood trim

Roofing: Copper standing seam with copper gutters and downspouts

Exterior openings: Aluminum clad windows and doors; painted steel railing systems

Walking surfaces: Trex decking, Bluestone entry porch, colored concrete terrace at basement

Interior finishes: Veneer plaster on main and second floor; drywall in basement; wide, wormy oak floors on main and upper levels; colored concrete in basement; steel stair railings; exposed white pine beams in great room and kitchen

Mechanical systems: Hydronic floor heat on main floor and basement level plus heat pumps throughout

Water heating: Indirect fired from hydronic boiler; 17KW Kohler backup generator

A wide front porch and standing-seam metal roof say Virginia, while the stucco—and black metal deck railings—suggest something more European.



Upon entering the home, visitors are greeted by a steel staircase and just a hint of the views beyond a freestanding bookcase. "You give them a little glimpse of what's coming and make them work to achieve it," says architect Chris Halstead of the entry sequence. The homeowners wanted an open living/dining space with plenty of light, and a kitchen that was separate (though still near) the other public spaces.

