

Inside.  
Outside.  
Home.

# Aboodeville

JULY 2014

A dark, narrow  
kitchen becomes  
airy and spacious

Free Union  
farm is a place  
to entertain



For the love  
of water

# One for the ages

Slate Hill's architecture  
reflects life's phases







# Long time home

*INSPIRED BY CAMPS, AN ARCHITECT  
CRAFTS A HOUSE FOR THE AGES*

*BY ERIKA HOWSARE, PHOTOGRAPHY BY VIRGINIA HAMRICK*



When Bethany and Mike Puopolo bought their acreage south of Ash Lawn-Highland, she embarked on a paradox. In designing a home, Bethany began with the image of a temporary structure: “a camp or a revival tent, something very plain and very simple.”

She and her family have now occupied this “camp” for nearly a quarter-century, and it bears all the marks of a life’s work—a structure remodeled to reflect the passage of life’s phases, and a landscape nurtured through the cycles of many seasons. “This was just raw land,” said Puopolo, a practicing architect known for her work on historic estates. “We’ve edited it and let it mature. It’s been a pleasure to have a dialogue with this place.”

The house facilitates that connection, using, for one thing, lots of glass on the long southern wall. But that modern element only updates a form that essentially harkens to rural traditions running deep through the American past. The house is basically a white farmhouse whose

“The structural elements became the finish elements,” said Bethany Puopolo. “The posts, floor joists, and brackets—you treat them with reverence because they’re exposed.”

character is not unlike the legions of two-story farmhouses dotting Central Virginia. Yet it also embraces the spirit of another iconic rural building, the barn.

Adopting the 12'x12' module used in barn construction—a move that flowed from her work with Virginia Frame Builders, a post-and-beam contractor that served as her builder at Slate Hill—allowed her to open up the interior for a contemporary floor plan, with kitchen, living, and dining areas combined. It also steered the aesthetic of the house. “The structural elements became the finish elements,” she explained—“the posts, floor joists, and brackets. You treat them with reverence because they’re exposed.”

Posts march through the first floor, punctuating the space as it loosely organizes around a slate fireplace. “In the winter, it steals the show,” said Puopolo. “It smells good, it feels good; it’s such a creature comfort.”

While the common areas look through large south-facing windows onto the gardens and pool just outside, the “private side” of the house—guest room, bath, and service rooms—lines up along the more solid northern wall. Upstairs, the master bedroom looks through double doors to the west and can be opened on three sides to function like a sleeping porch.

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Slate Hill’s many porches are not just a nod to Southern blueprints, but an attitude about “engagement with the land,” common to places where people choose to spend vacations, said architect Bethany Puopolo. The kitchen features cabinets in two tones: whitewashed lower ones and natural-wood upper ones, along with a pale concrete countertop. Blue gingham brings a custom touch to the upper cabinets. The family’s chickens, goats, and bees keep things down-to-earth.



## Sense of place

Though Slate Hill feels deeply lived-in, Puopolo said it has attributes of the temporary structures that originally inspired it.

“That’s why you have the breezeway running through the house,” she said. “It’s like a tent or camp house.” For her, the house’s many porches are not just a nod to Southern blueprints, but an attitude about “engagement with the land” common to places where people choose to spend vacations.

“It’s someplace you want to be,” she said. “There’s a strong sense of the place and its special features, whether it’s a mountain or a lake. We said, ‘Let’s live that way.’”

This particular site has no mountain view or lake, but it does have a subtle beauty characterized by rolling topography and wooded pockets that hide outcroppings of slate. The Puopolos have planted trees, laid walkways, installed a pool, and created a classic, parklike atmosphere. Goats, chickens, and bees keep things down-to-earth.

“When I clean house I have to mow,” Puopolo said. “The outside is as much a part of the house as the rooms.”

## THE BREAKDOWN

**Architect:** Bethany Puopolo

**Builder:** Virginia Frame

**Millwork/craftsman:** Tim Fisher Restoration

**Square footage:** Finished space: 2,736;  
porches: 1,408

**Structural system:** Timber frame

**Exterior materials:** Custom German lap wood siding

**Interior finishes:** 1' x 12' pine board walls, slate floors from property

**Roof materials:** Galvanized steel standing seam

**Window system:** Custom casement

**Mechanical systems:** Radiant floor heat and heat pump cooling



The palette throughout Slate Hill is serene and muted, with light blue as a favorite accent hue among a lot of neutrals. The home’s windows and interior doors were custom-made by the barn builders who constructed the house, and fitted out with handmade metal hardware by Stokes of England. “Nothing’s too precious,” said Bethany Puopolo about the house she designed and has occupied with her family for nearly a quarter-century. “It’s a country property. It’s practical and joyful detail rather than formal detail.”

## Slate on site

The slate from which Slate Hill—and this area of Albemarle County generally—takes its name is a palpable presence throughout the property. Literally, it is underfoot everywhere you go.

On the first floor of the house, flagstone-style slate pieces show an array of colors from blue to green to purple. Slate also surrounds the fireplace. Outside, it makes walkways, big beautiful stepping stones across the gravel breezeway, foundation facing, steps, and walls, and is even laid under boxwoods to protect their roots from the chickens.

Such an unusual and valuable on-site resource was one of the property’s original draws for the Puopolos. Twenty-four years after they came here,

“We’re still pulling out rocks and making walls, walkways, steps,” Bethany Puopolo said.

The Slate Hill area was once home to the Albemarle Slate Company, and there was also a slate quarry in Esmont for a time. But no commercial slate quarries exist these days in Albemarle. In neighboring Buckingham County, though, the Buckingham Slate Company, founded in 1867, is still going strong. The company quarries black slate and manufactures roof tiles, flooring, and other materials.

Slate can be an extremely durable material and, as Puopolo pointed out, is remarkably friendly to bare feet. “It’s surprisingly soft,” she said of the floor in her home’s first story. Being able to incorporate a native material has helped her achieve one of her main goals for the home: “I wanted you attached to the ground.” —E.H.