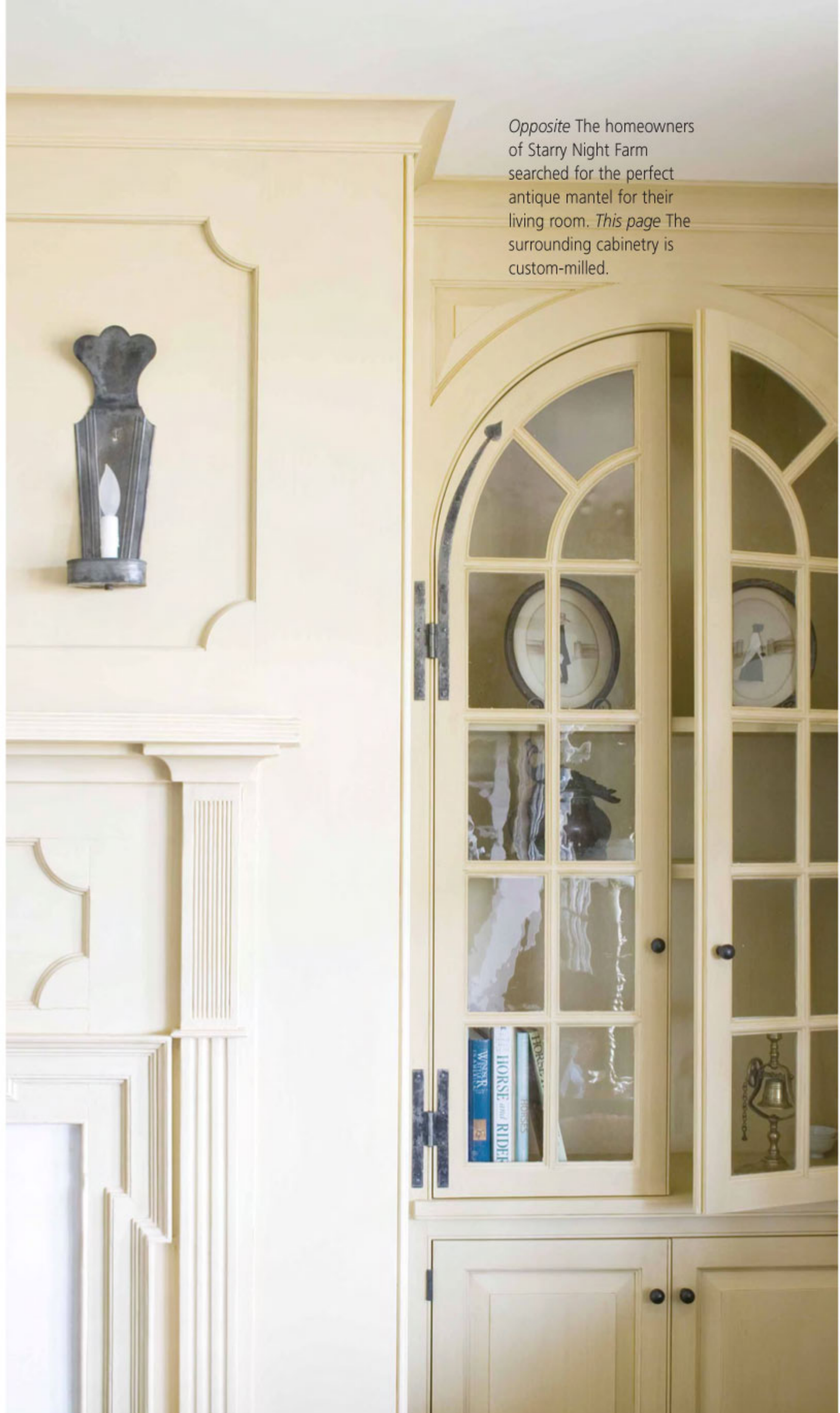




# *Starry Night*





Opposite The homeowners of Starry Night Farm searched for the perfect antique mantel for their living room. *This page* The surrounding cabinetry is custom-milled.

# Farm

Archer & Buchanan Architecture brings historic sensibility to a new stone farmhouse in Pennsylvania.

TEXT BY CATHLEEN MCCARTHY PHOTOS BY ERIK JOHNSON







At first glance, Starry Night Farm looks like many of the eighteenth-century farmhouses scattered around the countryside of Chester County, Pennsylvania. There is the weathered field-stone façade, the humble farmhouse expanded over the years, the outbuildings, the views of misty farmland stretching for miles in either direction. It's hard to believe the house didn't exist two years ago.

Chester County is the bucolic setting you find in many paintings by Andrew Wyeth, who grew up nearby. You'll find a couple of those paintings inside Starry Night Farm, along with works by the artist's father, N. C. Wyeth, and his son, Jamie. The farmland west of Philadelphia has been a retreat for the wealthy since the Wyeth clan settled there in the early twentieth century, along with many avid fox hunters. After the Brandywine Conservancy took control of the area in the 1980s, with easements limiting subdivisions to 33-acre parcels, the land became even more desirable.

By the time Mainline couple Scott and Roberta decided to build their weekend retreat there three years ago, good properties were hard to find in Chester County. They had taken up horseback riding along the Brandywine River a few years before and dreamed of finding the perfect old farmhouse.

Instead, they found a perfect 33-acre lot topped with a pink stucco eyesore built in the '80s. "It was universally hated," says Richard Buchanan, a principal at Archer & Buchanan Architecture, who was called in to replace the pink stucco with a classic farmhouse. The site of the original home, overlooking two valleys, allowed the kind of placement the easement laws usually forbid. "The idea is to tuck houses down and out of view," Buchanan states. "But they got a very visible space and a wonderful view—maybe the best in Chester County."

Buchanan lives not far away, in a farmhouse built in the 1750s and expanded over the centuries. He often uses his home as a model for the new old houses he designs. Scott and Roberta told him they wanted a weekend retreat that would accommodate friends and extended family for weekend visits, with plenty of privacy for themselves and designated areas to enjoy their individual interests. These included a jewelry studio for Roberta, a wine cellar, a garage and home theater for Scott,

*Opposite* Salvaged floors were incorporated throughout the house, including the kitchen. A large island anchors the space and offers the chef loads of prep room when feeding large crowds. The kitchen opens onto a back deck with views of the surrounding farmland. Above The mud room is outfitted with antique boot scrapers. Right Custom-milled doors lead into the garage from the back of the house.









and stables for their horses.

"I told Richard I wanted our house to feel like it had grown there," Roberta explains. Buchanan designed Starry Night Farm to look like a humble eighteenth-century three-bay farmhouse that was expanded, at some point, to a grander five bays. As another element of what he calls "the mythic history of the building," Buchanan masked the attached garage by creating the illusion of a thinner, taller building with a false brick chimney that might once have been a separate outbuilding, a summer kitchen. A copper roof connects this section, housing the mud room and Roberta's studio.

"I like that double reading you get when you look at an old house," Buchanan says. "When people build in the wilds of a frontier, they get by with what they need and let the next generation think about making it elegant. If you look closely at a house like that, you can see the asymmetries and quirks that betray what a simple farmhouse it was. I think this house has some of that double reading. It can support an interior with elegant furniture and paintings but still feel solid and permanent."

Creative use of salvaged materials furthered the illusion. "Part of what makes this house feel old is that most of the surfaces are, in fact, very old," states Buchanan. Its fieldstone came from an old barn that was being taken down nearby. "We have a very distinctive stone in this part of the world, and this was real fieldstone, weathered for millions of years in the fields so that it has a softness to it."

Seasoned builders at Griffiths Construction of Chester Springs, Pennsylvania, helped locate and, in some cases, hand-planed the surfaces of salvaged wide-plank floorboards, antique doors, jambs, and windowsills. Living and dining room mantels, both circa 1800, came from homes in South Carolina and Chester County. Buchanan designed vertical wallboard in the living room to resemble the cope-and-pattern paneling often found in Pennsylvania homes built in the 1700s.

Working with local antique dealers and decorator Kirsten McCoy of Meadowbank Designs in Wayne, Pennsylvania, Scott and Roberta filled the house with a mix of comfortable upholstered furniture and American antiques, mostly built in Pennsylvania between 1810 and 1830. "We weren't religious about it, but we were shooting for that era," Scott says. "Once you get into furniture from the eighteenth century, the cost goes way up and it's too formal. We were going for comfortable and relaxed."

Inspired by *New Old House* magazine, Roberta began searching for authentic materials for her new old house. She

*Opposite above* The stone façade was salvaged from an old barn close to the property. *Opposite below* The dining room is just off the kitchen and dressed in country antiques. *Above* The entryway to the house showcases a hand-milled staircase and salvaged transom window. *Right* The dining room hearth is created in an early Colonial style.









discovered that a local firm, Heritage Metalworks, was reproducing the collection of antique American hardware at the nearby Winterthur Museum. Their handiwork can be found throughout the house in hardware, sconces, chandeliers, and whimsical fox-shaped thumb latches designed by Buchanan.

From the beginning, Roberta stressed that she wanted the house to feel “cozy,” and, remarkably, it does—despite the fact that it measures 6,000 square feet. By distributing the living space over four floors and “using every bloody inch,” Buchanan managed to fit private guest suites on the upper floors, a staff apartment over the garage, and a basement level where Scott has an office overlooking the valley as well as his antique map collection, a wine cellar, and an entertainment center that’s acoustically and visually separate from the rest of the house.

The kitchen of Starry Night Farm has the warm hands-on feel of a Tuscany farmhouse but with modern amenities and a layout that opens onto the dining room. Buchanan maintained the intimacy of an older home by using ceiling beams salvaged from an old barn to delineate zones within the rooms and a square layout that makes the rooms accessible but visually distinct. “Fifty years ago, you wouldn’t have dreamed of giving the kitchen the dominant view or of having guests arrive and wander right into it,” Buchanan explains. “But our interest is in making houses work for the way we live today.”

One of the best spots to enjoy the expansive views is the back porch—but only in good weather. “In the winter we get incredible winds,” Scott states. “The house is located in a place no real farmer would have put it. An eighteenth-century farmer would have moved the house down the hill so it would be protected. But we deliberately chose to leave it where the pink house was, as high up and as far out of the woods as the conservancy would let us be.”

Despite the gusts, the porch has become one of their favorite parts of the house. “It has a beefiness about it that seems like overkill at first,” Buchanan says. “But if you’re there on a winter day, you’re glad it’s as robust as it is.”<sup>NOH</sup>

*Cathleen McCarthy is a freelance writer who lives in Pennsylvania.*

**For Resources, see page 70.**

**For additional information and photos of this house, visit [www.newoldhousemag.com](http://www.newoldhousemag.com).**

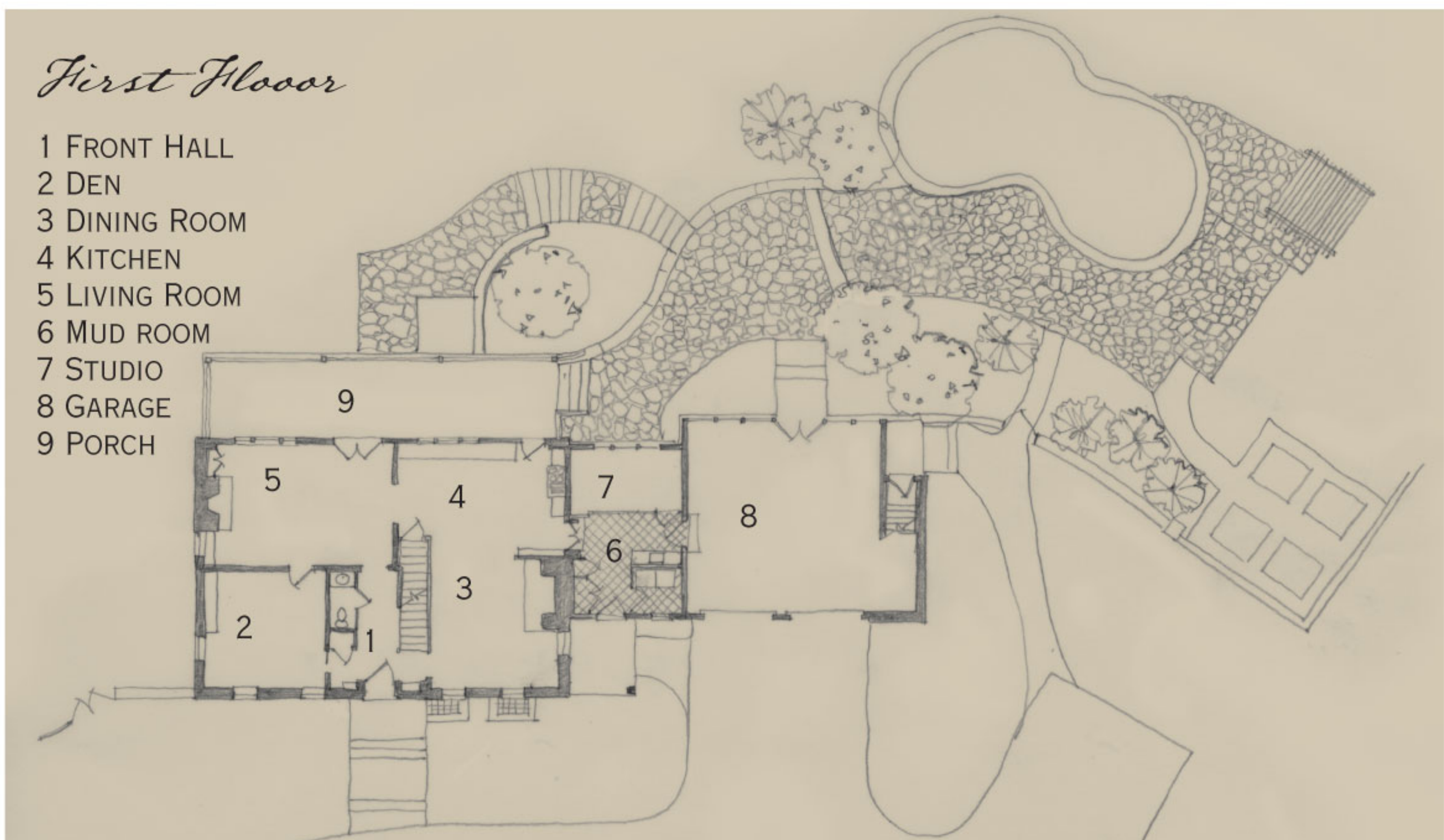
The master bedroom has an antique mantel and built-in cabinetry. *Top* The master bath is outfitted with a clawfoot tub and custom designed vanity. *Right* A detail of the mantel in the master bedroom.







Archer & Buchanan Architecture also designed a six-stall horse barn on the property. *Opposite* The back of the house offers decks and stone terraces to take in the views.



## First Floor

- 1 FRONT HALL
- 2 DEN
- 3 DINING ROOM
- 4 KITCHEN
- 5 LIVING ROOM
- 6 MUD ROOM
- 7 STUDIO
- 8 GARAGE
- 9 PORCH



