

# THE ODD COUPLE

*A thoroughly modern addition to a staunchly traditional house works surprisingly well*

BY DALE MACKENZIE BROWN

At first glance, the house, which is set amidst tall trees in the rolling Lovettsville, Virginia, countryside, appears to consist of two disparate parts, one Federal, the other contemporary. The clapboard main section—complete with front porch, six-over-six windows, dormers, and stone chimney—evokes an earlier age of snug low-ceilinged rooms, while the modern wing on the southeast corner exemplifies today's spacious, light-filled, sharp-edged architecture. Proud of itself, this addition wears a coat of bright barn-red paint. A black metal-wrapped chimney rises at the side, a midnight blue hanging stairwell protrudes at the rear, and floor-to-ceiling fixed glass panels are slotted into the front and back. Yet, thanks to Robert M. Gurney, the Alexandria, Virginia-based residential architect who designed the self-assertive extension, this marriage of past and present works perfectly.

The owners of the house had originally intended that Gurney renovate an existing two-story extension tacked on sometime this century—long before the couple bought the property in 1994. Though it contained a TV room, study, and upstairs bedroom, it was dark, cramped, and much in need of repair. Gurney proposed that it be torn down and replaced.

In designing the addition, which comprises a large ground-floor living area and a second-floor master bedroom suite, Gurney took his cue from the existing house, which had begun life as a one-room log cabin in the 18th century, grown a story in the early 19th, and then expanded further in the 20th. He felt the new wing should reflect this evolutionary history—a further step in the well-established process of transformation and change.

For budgetary reasons, Gurney preserved the original stone foundation, but this imposed space constraints. To free up precious square footage, he devised the addition's most strikingly contemporary feature: the staircase, clad in diagonal clapboard, that hangs on the back of the structure. Still, he was determined that however modern the extension might be, it should have some design and material elements in common with the main house. Thus the new gabled roof and shed dormers have lines that match the old, and both are covered in standing-seam black metal; the wing's exterior claddings—clapboard on the lower half, board and batten on the upper—are those of the old building; and the new double-hung windows are compatible in size and proportion with existing ones.

The net effect? Old and new complement each other but contrast sufficiently to energize and revivify the house as it boldly enters its third century. ■

*The house as it was (top right) before the addition (center and bottom right). Floor plans show the living area, two-story hall leading to a hanging staircase, and master bedroom suite. The log cabin from which the original house sprang can be seen in the room next to the kitchen at the rear right of the first-floor plan.*

