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## Shaggybark Farm's Shaggy Chic

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By Beth S. Buxbaum

Surrounded by a grove of Shaggybark trees, Shaggybark farm is cradled into the landscape off of a country road in Haycock Township. This property was once another homestead, with a different name and ownership. Drawn by the original 1744 log house, the new owners loved the homestead's history and landscape. After searching for an historic property for two years up and down the East Coast, they bought this homestead in 2006. Originally from this area, they were living in the Deep South for years, but knew they wanted to return east for the seasons and the lifestyle. Bucks County spoke to them, primarily the landscape, but also the people, the farming, the organic movement and the diversity. What was important to them was to find an historic home with character, that they would appreciate for its sense of warmth, its soul and energy.

In addition to the original 1744 log cabin there were several additions that changed the dwelling's footprint. One addition from the 1800s added a kitchen and a second floor bedroom. In the 1990s the prior owners began refurbishing the house. It was during their renovations that historic elements were uncovered, including exposed beams, original stone walls and ceilings. According to a floor plan of the house, there were two additions, one in 1993 adding a family room and sunroom and another in 1999 that expanded the interior with a dining room, new kitchen, breakfast room and a second floor bedroom suite.

As the newest owners of this property their focus was on the original and early structures. Their vision for the renovation was to return the house to its original beauty. Local lifestyle designer, Victoria Graves, was commissioned to redefine the space. "The owners fell in love with the circa 1744 log cabin that is the centerpiece of Shaggybark Farm," explains Victoria, "but I knew we were in for some major renovations to transform the chopped up, oddly dark and seemingly haphazard additions from the 1990s." One redeeming factor, Victoria notes, was that the historic portion of the home was perfectly preserved. Also a factor was during prior renovations many features of the house's historic integrity were covered over. "As a designer, this was a daunting project," Victoria admits. With an understanding that the owners' full appreciation was wrapped around the natural, raw elements of the original log house, she began to assess the challenge at

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"This was a six year project to graciously open up the space surrounding the log cabin so that it remained the heart of a home—a heart that exuded the soul and warmth of the original tiny dwelling," she describes. Walls came down, ceilings were raised and floors were torn up. Victoria orchestrated several overall changes to the house, adding all new doors and windows and changing all the lighting, adding recessed and cone lighting for a more subtle illumination. She began with a renovation of the living room, part of the 1800s addition, to provide the owners with a comfortable room to live in during the construction. Victoria remarks that this room was very dark, with dark wood trim and ceiling beams. One of the best features of the space was the stone wall with an expansive stone fireplace. Lightening the space was her goal. All the wood trim and ceiling beams were bleached and washed in a soft shade of grey. All the walls and ceiling, in between the beams, were washed in the same subtle tone. Once she accomplished the task of brightening this living space, she was on to the bigger project.

Victoria focused most of the drastic renovation in the 1999 addition. In this space each room was small and separate from the other, without any flow. Additionally, the dark shades of the wood ceiling beams, wood trim and floors closed in the space. "I knew I had to gut the entire middle of the structure," she exclaimed, "so we blew it out!" With a team of subcontractors, she began rebuilding and recreating this area of the house, with the log house and the historic elements of the structure as the defining focus. First they dug underground to create a crawl space and added radiant heat to the floor. Next, with the ceiling blown out, they added two floors and changed the rooflines so that, where there were seven, there are now only four.

Victoria's primary goal was to replicate the rustic, charming appeal of the 1744 dwelling, while redesigning this newly opened space to flow and breathe. Along with the redefinition of the interior, Victoria had another challenge. "Because the rooms did not relate," Victoria explains, "I needed to create a sense of connection from space to space." Her approach was to make the living space more inviting and comfortable. What was a dark, congested and mazelike grouping of rooms was transformed into an open, light and flowing living space. This new two-story great room includes a kitchen area, a family area with a fireplace and a seating area. "We wanted the living space to be accessible and functional, while maintaining the charm of its history," she describes.

To create a more open feel with a rustic edge, a cathedral ceiling was constructed, accented with exposed beams from old, recycled barn wood. The walls were painted a muted shade of grey, and limestone floors were installed. Victoria's approach of mixing old and new was a driving force in the design. To achieve a distressed, rustic finish on the wood beams, limestone floors and marble, Victoria and the contractors actually banged chains against the beams and chipped at the limestone and marble. These materials are tying this open great room space together, defining the signature styling and contrast. Victoria's sense of spatial relatedness was achieved in her repetition of materials, color tones, and the flowing of old and new from space to space. Without walls, the accents define the spaces.

Central to the great room is the kitchen area, with the layout designed by kitchen designer Jill Jarrett. This was the old galley kitchen and powder room. The goal was to keep the space flowing and functional, mixing old and new elements into the architectural design for a polished, yet rustic feel. Above the kitchen area is a coffered ceiling constructed from old barn siding. A fieldstone wall was built by hand in one corner of the kitchen space which houses the stainless steel double Wolf range and trapeze range hood by Zephyr. Counter tops and the center island are topped with Danby Vermont white and grey marble.

Designing with the knowledge that the owners love to entertain, a center island was built in the middle of the space to allow the hosts to prepare and cook for their guests while engaging. This center island has three distinctive elements. The base, inspired by an antique dresser that is tucked into a corner across the room, was built with two drawers on each side adding extra storage. At one end of the island is a half-table situated at a lower height allowing for easier hands-on preparation. On the other end is an old butcher block that Victoria remarks weighed 900 pounds and took seven men to carry in. After removing the legs, a wrought iron base was built adding another dimension of contrast to the space. On the exterior side of the island are old metal tractor seats, adding a touch of whimsy. Another design feature is that there are no cabinets. Victoria explains that the owners wanted easier access to kitchenware, spices and other pantry items. She designed a barn wood and metal étagère for this purpose. With a diversity of materials, this space blends the rustic elements of the exposed wood and stone with the more contemporary and finished metals and stainless steel.

Along the exterior wall of the second level, where there are bedrooms, Victoria create a vignette likened to a street scene using the old barn siding. From below it looks as though it is an outside façade with opened windows looking into an apartment. Victoria added this for a touch of whimsy. One other whimsical and playful touch is the swing hanging from the beams on two ropes. Victoria added this to the space for the owners' little girl to play on while the house was under construction. Extending out from the kitchen area are spaces designed to be inviting spots to gather. In one corner a cozy family area was created with a fireplace. On the other side is a second sitting area designed for informal dining. Meandering from space to space, each space is defined by a different chandelier. The entire expanse is illuminated with recessed lights set into the wood beams. A wall of windows and doors along the outside wall brings in the outside and lights up the interior.

Additional space, expanding out from the great room, is a more formal dining area and a smaller informal



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dining area. Near the rear of this open space is one of a few dividing walls with a simple arched entranceway to the living room. Victoria's concept was to square off the opening and add a wall of cabinetry finished in Bible Black, a British paint color. For a pop of color and contrast to the black painted woods, the corner walls are painted chartreuse. Also on the adjacent wall, Bible Black was applied to the cabinet and entranceway leading into the library, the 1990s addition to the log house. In this room, there were soffits that were a hiding ductwork. The soffits were removed and a wall of bookcases and new moldings were added. The ceiling was raised and distressed, light colored beams were added, along with beach wood floors that replaced the old dark floor. One wall is the exterior wall from the log house, which was untouched. On the other walls Victoria applied a grass cloth in a neutral color. "My goal here was to make this room more inviting," she adds. By lightening up the room and adding the beams and light flooring, the space took on a new feel of rustic warmth and elegance.

Rustic, warm and elegant are perfect ways to describe the interior of Shaggybark farm. Victoria coins the phrase shaggy chic to capture the essence of her interior creation. "My signature shaggy chic textural style feels modern and sophisticated, salvaged and rustic all at the same time," she explains. From floor to ceiling and room to room, the materials, tones, textures and colors are mixes of bold and muted, textured and soft, reclaimed and new. "My vision was that anywhere you went in the house it would feel as good as the log cabin feels. I believe that you have to create a feel, not match a style. Shaggybark Farm evolved from an inspiring piece of history to a haven for those that live here."

Beth S. Buxbaum is a freelance writer from the Philadelphia area.

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