

# Clem Labine's Period Homes

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The New Period Home





Kate Johns, AIA, of Chatham, NY, designed a two-story, 2,800-sq.-ft. house for a couple in Columbia County, NY. The small farmhouse blends influences of the Greek Revival style with contemporary open-floor-plan loft living. All photos: courtesy of Kate Johns, AIA

# Open Ended

A new farmhouse in Columbia County, NY, marries Greek Revival-influenced elevations with a contemporary plan.

**PROJECT:** RESIDENCE, COLUMBIA COUNTY, NY

**ARCHITECT:** KATE JOHNS, AIA, CHATHAM, NY; KATE A. JOHNS, AIA, PRINCIPAL

**BUILDER:** BILL STRATTON BUILDING COMPANY, OLD CHATHAM, NY

Columbia County, NY, a rural area about 40 miles south of Albany, has a strong heritage of Greek Revival houses, many dating from the late-1700s and early-1800s. It is only fitting that a couple building a new home there would look to the period and style for inspiration. Designed by Kate Johns, AIA, of Chatham, NY, their two-story, 2,800-sq.-ft. house was certainly influenced by the region's history, but is also thoroughly contemporary in plan.

The combination of formal and informal aspects was the result of a truce between the clients. "The wife liked the regional styles – the Greek Revival and Federal," says Johns, "but the husband preferred an open, contemporary feel. They decided to meet halfway, if it was possible."

These seemingly conflicting interests are recognized and balanced in the design. "I specialize in the vernacular architecture of an area and have worked in this county for many years," says Johns. "The Greek Revival design inspiration is something that I have used again and again, so that was familiar. But I never settle on one distinct style, so blending their styles, while challenging, was not out of my comfort zone."

The main façade is the first indication of a mixing of styles. The portico is quite simple and while it is symmetrical and features plain, square columns, it does not have a fully articulated entablature. The rear elevation mirrors this design, but with oversized 6-over-6 windows and French doors enclosing a living/dining area on the first floor. The clients wanted as much natural light as possible. As a result, Johns' design is atypical of the Greek Revival style in terms of the volume of windows, but she retained a typical fenestration pattern and added triangular clerestory windows at the

front and rear. The true-divided-lite wood windows were fabricated by Warroad, MN-based Marvin Windows. Johns describes the house as a "Greek Revival with glass."

Just as the windows are made in a traditional material, so are other elements of the house. Johns specified cedar siding from Herrington's Lumber of Hillsdale, NY, a combination of cedar and eastern white pine trim and copper guttering. The roofing, on the other hand, is architectural asphalt shingles from Wayne, NJ-based GAF Materials.

Because the house is located in a rural setting, it was also inspired by farmhouses of the region. The 33-acre property itself is surrounded by farms and even has its own dairy barn that dates to the 1930s, so the farmhouse concept was more than appropriate. "I wanted to design an 'original' farmhouse that fit the location," says Johns. "It's logical to build a farmhouse in this area on this land surrounded by barns and farms."

The house is accessed by a short dirt road. It is fairly close to the main road as, Johns points out, a house of the 19th century would be. While the



Johns makes extensive use of oversized fenestration to bring light into the house and capitalize on the views of farms and an orchard to the west of the house. The true-divided-lite wood windows, fabricated by Warroad, MN-based Marvin Windows, are historically proportional and the glass is traditionally sized.





Herrington's Lumber of Hillsdale, NY, supplied the cedar siding. The roofing is architectural asphalt shingles from Wayne, NJ-based GAF Materials.

setting was already pristine, some formal landscaping, including an orchard to the west of the house and plantings along an old stone wall with large trees alongside it, was created.

The interior is not traditionally styled, but informed by farmhouse and loft architecture. "Because of the expansive glass and the nature of a loft," says Johns, "it was difficult to combine the historical and modern on the interior." The moldings are simple, and flat, beaded trim was used for the door and window surrounds. The most expressive detail may be the tongue-and-groove painted eastern white pine ceiling in the living and dining area, the lumber for which was supplied by Hankle Lumber of East Nassau, NY. The lighting, which points upward from the tops of the wood beams, was designed to accentuate the ceiling, which is 26 ft. tall at its peak.

Johns had never before designed such an open floor plan, but she embraced the challenge. A central room serves as both the living and dining areas as well as the kitchen. By using an island, the kitchen is open to the living area, yet is defined as a separate space. "The plan is compact, so even though it is open it is also cozy and comfortable," says Johns. "From the center of the house, one can look out to the fields that lie to the south and west and the barns that sit to the east. There are 270-degree views."



FIRST FLOOR

From the portico, the entrance/stair hall welcomes one into the house. The kitchen, living and dining areas make up the center room and wings to either side accommodate a sunroom (left) and two guest bedrooms and a guest bathroom (right). Floor plan: courtesy of Kate Johns, AIA

Two guest bedrooms and a bathroom are situated in a wing to the west of the living area. In a symmetrical wing opposite this is a sunroom. "Originally, it was going to be a screened-in porch," says Johns, "but the clients later decided that they wanted to be able to use the room year round." Greek Revival details — such as pilasters and trim — that match those of the portico can be found on the façade and interior of the sunroom. There are also two decks, one on either side of the living room. "These are small, informal areas," says Johns, "but they each have enough room for a few chairs."



A central room with a 26-ft.-tall ceiling serves as both the living and dining rooms and kitchen. Above the kitchen area is the master-bedroom suite. A special feature is the curved balcony railing, which has wood and iron balusters and a solid-cherry banister.





A focal point of the living room is a fireplace with a simple wood mantel.

The second story contains only the master-bedroom suite. "It's in a loft that is open to the living area below," says Johns. "This seemed a special place to situate the master bedroom, because it's private and open and airy all at the same time, and awards incredible views of the country, including the Berkshire Mountains."

The balcony balustrade was one of the challenges of the design of the house, says Johns. It is curved and, for strength and durability, the balusters vary between wood and iron. "Wood balusters are much cheaper than metal balusters but aren't strong enough," says Johns. "Metal, on the other hand, was out of our price range, so we used an 18th- and 19th-century technique of using iron in place of wood every couple of balusters. We painted the iron to look like wood so they would appear indistinguishable from one another." A solid-cherry curved banister was made to match the balusters.

The house boasts random-width, wide-board Ponderosa pine flooring from Herrington's Lumber throughout. Even the bathroom floors are wood, though the bases of the showers are tiled. A brick masonry fireplace with a salvaged-wood mantel is a highlight of the living room.

Seven months after construction began, the Columbia County farmhouse was completed and the owners moved in. In its country setting, its appearance on the landscape is similar to other homes in the area, but, upon closer examination, the contemporary influences become apparent. The combination of styles makes it a truly unique design. Johns, known for her houses steeped in regional design traditions, can now add this sensitive eclectic design to her portfolio. — *Hadiya Strasberg*



Johns uses simple trim for the interior. Random-width, wide-board Ponderosa pine flooring from Herrington's Lumber adds to the informal feel.



The kitchen features custom cabinetry and a kitchen island that defines the kitchen as a separate space.