The Modern Farmhouse
Inspiration for creating simple, sustainable dwellings

Add a Farmer’s Porch

Vintage-Inspired Windows

Design a Cutting Garden

Country Cottage on the Hudson
THE NATURE OF PLACE

Architect John Murray re-creates a country house on the Hudson River.

BY ARCHITECT JOHN B. MURRAY FROM CLASSICAL INVENTION (Montacelli Press, 2013) | PHOTOS BY DUSSERTON SAYLOR
"There's an ideal structural expression for every residence, and the architect's job is to define it, shape it, and bring it into being."

How each of us does depends on the particular circumstances, as well as our own aesthetic philosophies. Some of us prefer to enhance the existing essence, quirks and all. Others would rather smooth out the idiosyncrasies, aiming for symmetry and balance. Still others go for the temple-like approach. For this weekend house, a wonderfully eccentric accretion of a century and more that bellies up to the banks of the Hudson River, the client preferred the first. So did I. Here, that involved rebuilding the entire structure under its existing mansard roof, then cladding it in passing tinted to match the local Palisades stone.

Given the house's unique proximity to the river, we wanted to make it as extravertered as possible. That we did with new windows that open the house to the river. But we hewed to the house's rather unusual ground-floor parti, which had the porch connecting the living room and dining room, the kitchen (offside with a corner work area), one guest bedroom adjacent to the stair hall, and a tall studio.

From the quaint, compressed entry through the new stair hall, the interior opens up into the beamed living space. The position of doors, windows, and fireplace—all are part of the design. The simplicity of the finishes is intrinsic to making the new architecture appear timeless. Painted woods, natural plaster walls, stone floors, and hand-hewn beams with plaster interstices overhead feel solid and organic, and recall the vernacular architecture of the area's early Dutch settlers. The built-in cabinetry reinforces that effect. The decor, by interior designer Sam Blount, captures the spirit of the house.

The kitchen is at the heart of this house. Framed by windows overlooking the water, it incorporates a generous work area, simple semi-overlay style cabinetry, and a breakfast table by a raised hearth. The shallow fireplace brings the fire front and center. Elevating the hearth puts the fireplace right in the sightlines of those in the work area and at the table.

Arrayed off the second floor landing are the master bedroom suite, a guest bedroom, and his study. In a first for us, the master bedroom incorporates Harvest-hinged French doors, flanked by sidelights, that open onto a new deck with tranquil river views. Finely engineered casement windows include pull-down screens. The doors from the master bath provide additional access to the deck.

The porch adjacent to the living room offers a transitional area that opens gracefully to the pergola beyond. There, wisteria now cloaks the stone terrace and creates beautifully dappled shade. The effect? A celebration of nature's glories, the wonders of place, and of history—root, branch, and all, no.

For resources, see page 70.
Top: The kitchen's east elevation faces the Hudson. Two added windows, the house's only in-swing casements, created a space for wall art. Above: Simple cabinetry frames out-swinging casement windows.

On the living room's north end is a fireplace with a honed slate firebox and antique limestone mantel. Hand-hewn beams accentuate the ceiling.
“The porch opens gracefully onto the pergola.”

Designed for year-round use, the porch accommodates Screens. French doors lead out to a pergola.
For the country house on the Hudson River, John Murray created a soothing retreat. The master bedroom’s Harmon-hinged doors open to the upstairs deck. The mansard roof is in keeping with the massing of the original house.

“I believe the art of architecture lies in the refined eye, in understanding and elucidating the form of each component and refining all the nuances.”
—JOHN B. MURRAY