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# A NEW 'Old' Farmhouse

A married team of architect and builder  
construct a new home in historic style



The Rochelles' new "old" farmhouse occupies a rise on a 43-acre site in Alexandria Township. It commands views of a one-acre pond, woods and open fields.

**WRITER** ROBIN AMSTER **PHOTOGRAPHER** DAVID VAN SCOTT **ARCHITECT** SUSAN ROCHELLE, AIA  
**GENERAL CONTRACTOR** PHILLIP W. ROCHELLE BUILDING

The Rochelles designed their new home to resemble an old farmhouse. It took them six years to complete the phased construction of the two-story fieldstone structure.



## Architect Susan Rochelle and her builder husband, Phil, searched for months without luck

for a large property that would realize their dream of a home with beautiful views of woods and water. With two daughters and ties to the community, the couple wanted to stay in Alexandria Township, Hunterdon County. Given their professions, building a new home on the envisioned lot would not be an issue.

“But several local real estate agents told Phil and I it would be nearly impossible to find something with both water and wood views,” says Rochelle, a member of the American Institute of Architects and owner of Susan M. Rochelle Architect in Milford. Enter fate in the person of a real estate agent/friend from another part of the state. “He knew we had been looking

and sent us a listing he had found in our town. It said a ‘King-Sized Opportunity,’” she says.

Six years later Susan and Phil, owner of Phillip W. Rochelle Building in Milford, completed a project that turned the opportunity into reality: the demolition of an old ranch house on the 43-acre site and the construction of a new home that sits on a rise with stunning views of deep woods, open fields and a tranquil one-acre pond below.

The new home—a three-bedroom, two-story stone-front structure that evokes an old farmhouse—uncannily resembles a sketch Susan made on a napkin following her first visit to the site. “I looked at

Phil Rochelle suggested using beams salvaged from centuries-old barns and other structures here in the foyer and throughout for the historic, rustic look of an old farmhouse. The flooring is random-width cherry. Elsewhere in the home, wide-plank oak flooring is historically authentic: Different materials would have been used in different areas over time, Susan Rochelle explains.



A huge fieldstone fireplace is the focus of the family room, which is open to the kitchen and dining area. Susan Rochelle designed the stone archway (left) for two purposes: It serves as a support for the chimney flue and it mimics an exterior stone wall in an old farmhouse that would have been expanded over the years.

the [existing] house and could see that proportionally it could work,” she remembers. “The visual length of the house could be tempered easily by creating a two-story section in the middle.”

It made sense to build a home resembling a farmhouse given Phil Rochelle’s life-long desire to have horses. The home also would act as a showcase for his wife’s work as an architect and his expertise in construction and woodwork.

“As a rule we embrace traditionally inspired designs that provide for the way we live today,” Susan Rochelle says. “We’ve created a farm complete with horses and, at times, chickens and cows.”

#### **HISTORIC STYLE, MODERN LIVING**

While the Rochelles wanted the warmth, charm and authenticity of a 100-year-old farmhouse, they didn’t want to live with interior styles from that period. Among their requirements for the new home:

- An open floor plan with the kitchen open to the family room and dining area.



- A bedroom for each daughter plus a place for them to hang out together, do homework or watch television.
- A master suite on the first floor so the Rochelles can remain in the house as they age.
- A laundry room convenient to the master suite.
- A first-floor mud room with four closets—one for each member of this active family.

Construction took place in five phases. In phase one the Rochelles removed the center section of the

ranch house and replaced it with a section comprising a family room, kitchen, dining area, laundry and mud room on the first floor and the girls' two bedrooms, homework area and bathroom on the second floor.

Phase two saw the transformation of the two-bedroom and bath wing on the right side of the original house into the master suite with two walk-in closets and master bathroom. A terrace and gardens were added in phase three and a master suite bal-

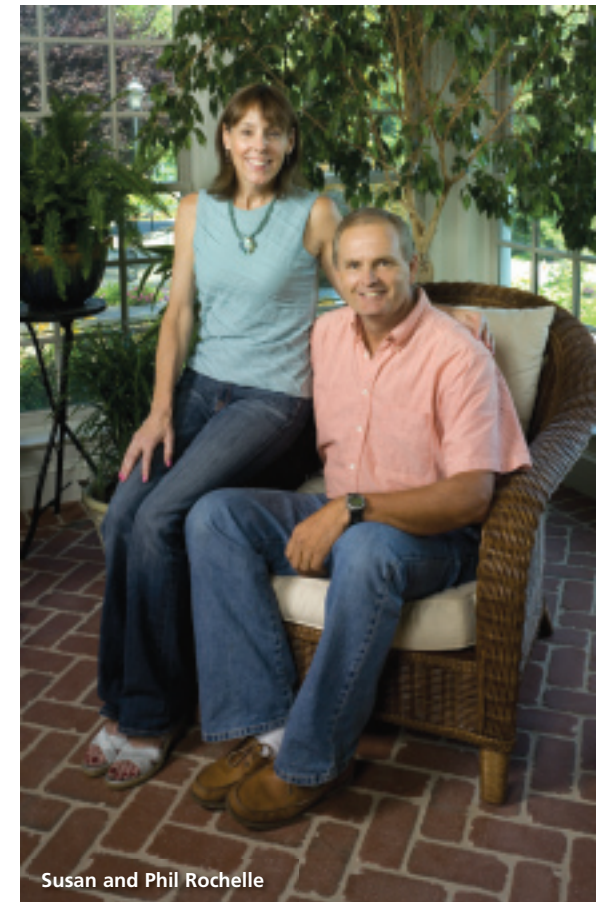
cony in phase four. In phase five the Rochelles removed the original kitchen and dining room on the left side of the house and added a sunroom, foyer, covered porch with stone arch, closets, second mud room, and Phil's study and full bathroom, which doubles as a guest suite.

The project was a collaborative effort. She did the "big picture" design work, floor plans and elevations. He was the general contractor and, as construction got under way, came up with additional ways to



**Opposite:** Floor-to-ceiling windows bring warmth and natural light into the sunroom. The space has a brick floor, tongue-and-groove planked walls and a bead-board ceiling. Susan Rochelle says the sunroom is perfect for winter gardening and enjoying the outdoors in cold weather.

**Top:** The sunroom and covered porch with a stone arch (at left) were added during the last phase of construction. Susan Rochelle envisioned the porch as a transitional space between the outdoors and indoors and as a shelter for arriving guests. "We love to sit here during summer downpours," she says.



Susan and Phil Rochelle

“As a rule we embrace traditionally inspired designs that provide for the way we live today.”

— SUSAN ROCHELLE



incorporate antique elements that furthered the “story” of an old farmhouse.

These included the use of salvaged beams—some easily 200 years old—and planked ceilings throughout. He also had the corners of the foyer walls rounded to give the impression they were plastered long ago; added wainscoting in the family room, kitchen and stairway; and suggested a planked door leading from the family room to the basement.

#### STAYING ON

The Rochelle family moved into the existing house—originally a one-room 1950s-era hunting cabin expanded in the seventies—four years before starting construction of the new home. They remained in the home during construction, a daunting prospect for many homeowners. “Many of our clients choose to move out of their homes temporarily when the work is as extensive as what we did here,” Susan Rochelle



**Opposite:** The contemporary kitchen that Susan Rochelle designed is right at home in the farmhouse-style home. Open to the family room and dining area, the kitchen has maple cabinetry with a white glaze, a large island and granite countertops in shades of rust, gray and silver. An antique-style plank door off the family room leads to the basement.

**This page:** Phil Rochelle suggested, among other authentic elements, the light blue wainscoting lining the walls of the dining room. Windsor chairs pull up to a large dark pine dining table. The hutch occupies a recess his wife designed.



**Top:** The master bedroom exudes warmth and tranquility with pale yellow walls; a four-poster bed dressed in a yellow, green, blue and pink floral comforter; and window treatments to match the bed linens. The carpeting is sage green.

**Below:** The master bathroom features his and hers cherry vanities and molding. Ivory tile and the travertine floor contrast with the dark wood. There are views to the greenery outside from the large soaking tub.



admits. “Our familiarity with the construction made it much less scary for us.”

In fact, “it was actually fun,” she adds. The couple packed up everything in the affected areas of each construction phase and stored it in a rented tractor-trailer on site. “There was one bout of rainy weather that, well, dampened our spirits. But other than that, it was just like Christmas every day—seeing something new,” she says.

Once the home was completed, the Rochelles furnished it in an eclectic mix of traditional antique

farmhouse and craftsmen elements in keeping with a historic home and geared to the family’s casual lifestyle. Leather armchairs and cushy loveseats sit before a huge fieldstone fireplace in the family room. Windsor chairs circle a dark pine table in the dining area. And a four-poster bed is at the center of the master bedroom.

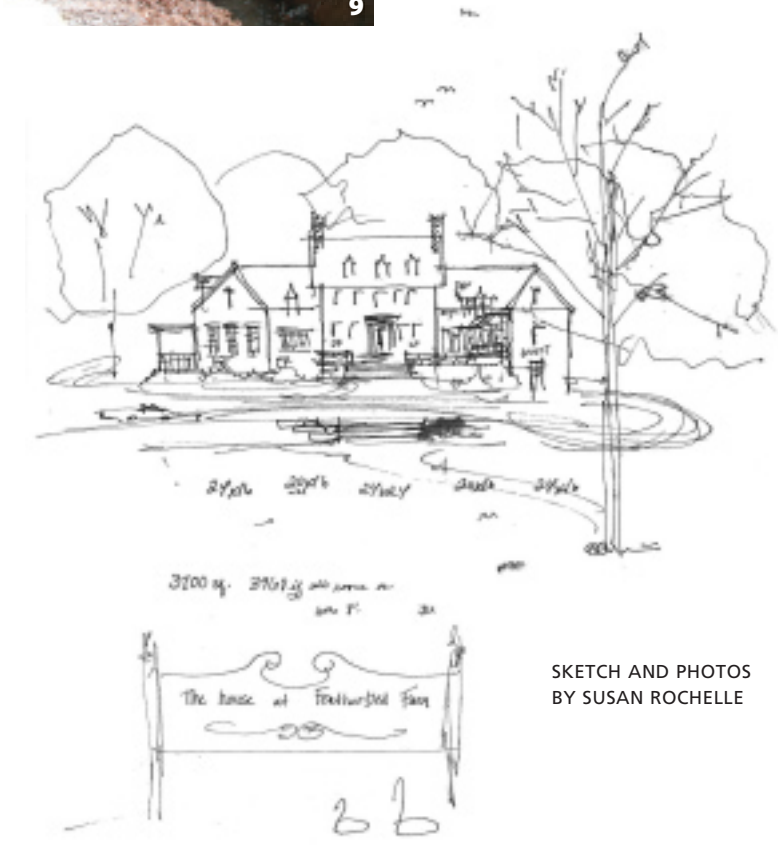
After the huge project, the Rochelles are enjoying their new “old” home. But they’re not quite finished. They’re contemplating tweaking their creation by replacing a tiny guesthouse now used as a potting shed with a “carriage house” that will serve as a guesthouse and garage. ☐

*Robin Amster is a freelance writer based in Madison.*

**SOURCES Overall:** architecture, Susan M. Rochelle, AIA, Architect in Milford; general contractor, Phillip W. Rochelle Building in Milford; structural engineering, Joseph Benigno Engineering Associates in Califon; flower arrangements, Flowers by the River in Califon; artwork, Made to Order in Clinton. **Exterior:** terrace plants, Cierech’s Greenhouse in Phillipsburg; terrace lamps, Genie House Lighting in Vincentown through Olde Tye Post & Lantern in Randolph. **Foyer:** ceiling fixtures and sconces, Domb Lighting in Morristown. **Family Room:** loveseats, Hancock & Moore in Hickory, North Carolina; leather chairs, Ethan Allen; chandelier, Hesco Lighting in Annandale; lighting design, Lighting Professionals Inc. in Rancho Palos Verdes, California; recessed lighting, Feldman Bros. Electrical Supply in Paterson. **Sunroom:** wicker chairs and ottoman, Pottery Barn; tumbled brick flooring, Avid Tile in South Plainfield. **Kitchen:** counter-tops, Arena Stone in Carlstadt; backsplash, Virtue Tile in Summit and Hi-Qu Tile in Phillipsburg; lighting design, Lighting Professionals Inc.; recessed lighting, Feldman Bros. Electrical Supply. **Dining Room:** chandelier, Hesco Lighting. **Master Bedroom:** duvet cover and window treatments, Hillhouse Collection from Country Curtains in Ridgewood. **Master Bathroom:** tile and travertine, Tile Barn in Lebanon; fixtures, Ferguson Appliance, Kitchen, Bath & Lighting Center in Ringoes.



1. Daughters Maddie (left) and Katherine Rochelle in front of the original ranch home.
2. Front deck removed and ground excavated for the new foundation.
3. New foundation being built.
4. Middle section of original house removed.
5. Framing under way for new middle section.
6. New middle section nears completion.
7. Phase one (kitchen/dining/family room, mud room, laundry in middle section), phase two (master suite in right section) and phase three (terrace across front) completed.
8. Old kitchen and dining room wing on left side removed.
9. Foundation being laid for phase five (new foyer, sunroom, den).
10. Framing for sunroom/den.
11. The project nears completion.



SKETCH AND PHOTOS  
BY SUSAN ROCHELLE

As Featured in the December 2012/January 2013 of