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SUMMER CAMP

BEFORE



IN THE NAME OF PRESERVATION

3 Ways to rehab – not rebuild – that old cabin **BY FRAN SIGURDSSON**

Bulldozing an old cabin to make way for a new one is a fairly common practice. Bucking that trend, three pros share their secrets for preserving old cabins while blending new with old.

Case Study 1: Summer camp

Who says summer camp is just for kids? They may not go in for archery, but one young-at-

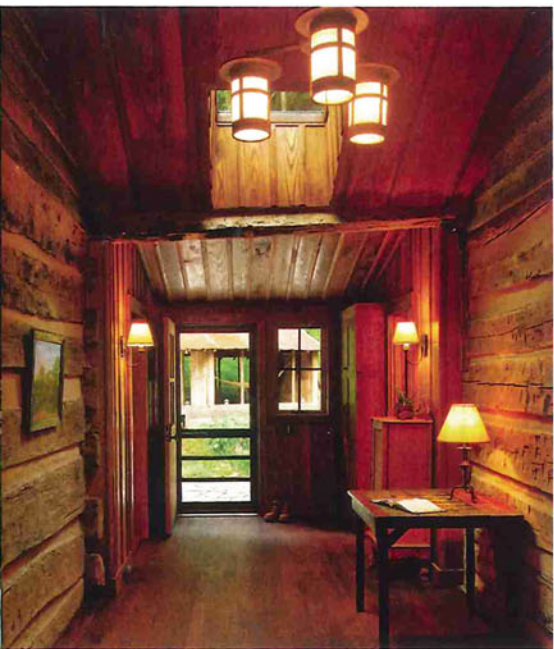
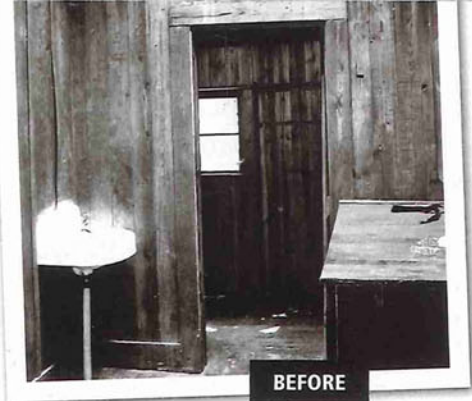
heart Atlanta couple hit the bull's eye in 2009. That year, Don and Sue (not their real names; the duo prefer to be anonymous) discovered a former overnight camp in North Carolina's Blue Ridge Mountains. The 150-acre grounds offered solitude, scenic views, and cool breezes.

But the property had lain abandoned for decades after the camp closed. Several major buildings and 40-odd cabins stood derelict, overtaken by weeds and wild critters. The

Factoid

The dogtrot, also known as a breezeway house, dog-run, or possum-trot, was a style common throughout the Southeastern United States during the 19th and early 20th centuries. Some theories place its origins in the southern Appalachian Mountains. – Wikipedia

Above photos by Duncan McPherson



In this project, the original two cabins were made into a living room and a bedroom. A new addition at the rear features a kitchen, bath, mudroom, and laundry with stackable washer and dryer. The dogtrot was rebuilt to be more transparent with door and windows. Half of it features exposed hand-hewn logs; the other half is sided with chestnut paneling.

couple, however, saw past the disrepair. Instead, they pictured a relaxing family gathering place. They also wanted to preserve what had been a local landmark.

Both had experience rehabbing old buildings, including their primary residence in a historic district of Atlanta. For this project, they turned to Samsel Architects in nearby Asheville. The firm is noted for historic preservation and green design. Samsel principal Duncan McPherson, AIA, helped the couple assess five or six buildings for their personal cabin.

They chose a dogtrot style that once served as the camp office. "Originally, it was two small cabins on land three miles from here," explains Don. The cabins

RESTORATION TIPS

"The biggest problem with any log home isn't insulation. It's air infiltration," notes restoration expert Mark D. Johnson. "Hand-hewn logs vary in thickness, and gaps vary, from none up to four inches." Some tips from Johnson:

1. Take advantage of the latest technology in preservatives, sealants and chinking.
2. Install the best windows that you can afford.
3. SIPs (structural insulated panels) are one of the most airtight building systems available. The panels consist of an insulating foam core sandwiched between oriented strand board (OSB). Using an SIP panel roof and spray foam insulation will make your cabin as energy efficient as possible.

Check out these tips from Duncan McPherson, AIA, Samsel Architects, Asheville, N.C.:

1. Employ local materials and craftspeople to strengthen the cabin's connection to the area.
2. Salvage and reuse what you can from

the property or existing structures.

3. Repair, rather than replace, what's historical. When you're blending new with old, don't try to pretend it's all original. New additions should be compatible, but different so you can see how the building evolved.
4. Conceal modern elements like heating, electrical, and plumbing systems.

And here are some tips from historic preservationist, Michael Sullivan, Artifacts Consulting, Tacoma, Wash.:

1. Keep a scrapbook with any documents you find. Take photos and list the elements in the building that are the most valuable to you.
2. Before you go out and buy materials, explore the property. Basements, attics, garages, barns, and sheds may be a treasure trove of supplies. The Sullivans found a cache of unused hinges, locksets, and other period hardware, still in original boxes!
3. Reuse. Sullivan recycled scrap lumber he found at the cabin to make furniture and shelving.

RESOURCES: artisanrestorationmn.com, samselarchitects.com, artifacts-inc.com.

were disassembled and brought to the site in the 1920s when the camp was founded. "That's pretty common for pioneer log cabins in this area," notes McPherson. "Old notches indicate where roof rafters used to be." A breezeway joined the cabins under a common roof.

The setting was idyllic, alongside a babbling creek. However, the cabin itself was literally rotting in the ground. Built a foot too low, dirt and rain played havoc with the flooring. Wilson Construction, a Fairview, N.C., company experienced in restoring old cabins, came to the rescue. The cabin was jacked up, and the foundation relaid with the original stone. Original framing was reinforced for safety. "We were able to maintain the integrity of the original shell, but upgrade to something comfortable year-round," notes McPherson.

The Mighty Chestnut

Chestnut was the wood of choice in pioneer days. Straight-grained, light, and rot resistant, it was ideal for building cabins and barns, as well as furniture. Back then, American chestnut trees towered over the eastern U.S., reaching heights of 100 feet and 14 feet in girth. Until that is, a blight decimated the species in the early 1900s.

The American Chestnut Foundation in Asheville is attempting to restore the tree species to the eastern woodlands. It seems fitting that the cabin owners agreed to have chestnut trees planted on their property to test new blight-resistant strains.