

# BETTING THE FARM

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An architect's gamble pays off with a Shelter Island showcase

WHEN IAN MCDONALD MOVED FROM Manhattan to tiny Shelter Island, he had visions of a simple farmhouse befitting the area's rich rural history. But the home he built there wasn't for his own use. Instead, the architect wanted a portfolio showcase that would serve as the foundation of his new eponymous firm. So even without a buyer secured, McDonald purchased 1.1 acres and built a nearly 3,000-square-foot farmhouse—what he calls a “quintessential Shelter Island residence” with roots in the early 20th century.



Plans for this new-construction Shelter Island home were based on the traditional architecture of the area's farmhouses.



In the kitchen, green slate countertops contrast against white cabinetry. In the living room.

“There was a lot of financial risk,” he says of his company's first complete residential project, “but the house was the best advertising for a new office.”

And it was a gamble that paid off, with a buyer, new clients, numerous inquiries and the Vetter Inspired Project award for Best Custom Home (less than 3,000 square feet), which was judged by members of the Boston Society of Architects.

The buyer was Jim Offutt, vice president of Coach factory stores, who was drawn by the casualness of McDonald's design. The home also reminded Offutt of the farmhouse in the South where his mother was raised. An avid boater, the Manhattan resident had been looking for what he describes as “a laid-back, friendly place with a country feel and access to water.” And thanks to McDonald, he found it.

The architect replicated themes found in typical Shelter Island farmhouses, which feature a main house, a porch and other detached additions or barn-like structures. His version includes four bedrooms, three and a half bathrooms and a wraparound porch, as well as a barn, which is used as a garage.

“Even though I scaled this farmhouse up for contemporary use, I was trying to make it look old and like it had been added on to,” says McDonald, who considers himself a contextualist. “A lot of people can’t believe it’s new construction.”



The fireplace’s surround and threshold were constructed of reclaimed bricks. The mantel was custom-designed by the architect.

Indeed, clever design tricks create an aged effect starting right at the front door. The off-the-shelf item was dressed with a mahogany sill to make it look traditional. And instead of clad windows, McDonald chose a Vetter wood for a more old-fashioned look. Inside, he used beams procured from an old factory in Kingston, New York, and a Rumford fireplace, surround and threshold were constructed from reclaimed brick. The floors are made of 4-inch-wide white oak planks with a Jacobean finish. In the kitchen, shaker-style Plain & Fancy cabinetry, inset doors and a green slate countertop are classic touches.

Still, the residence has a contemporary flavor, with almost every room painted a different color. Adjacent to a simple staircase, the entry hall appears larger, with two large pocket doors flanking the main-floor master suite. This “flex room” is suitable for a den, office or first-floor bedroom.

Throughout, McDonald experimented with natural light, dimensions, depth and perception. Ceiling heights are juggled to evoke different experiences. While the living room showcases a 16-foot cathedral ceiling, the first floor’s height drops to 9 feet and the powder room and kitchen goes down to 8 feet to set the tone for a more intimate feel. And multiple windows in virtually every room guarantee brightness.

It’s a contemporary take on the traditions passed down through generations of Shelter Island residents. And even a newcomer can appreciate that history.

Says Offutt, “The house has simply surpassed all my expectations.”