

How Kevin O'Connor became our new TV host (page 74)



This Old House

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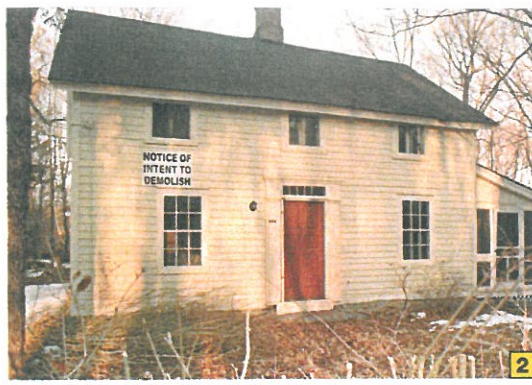
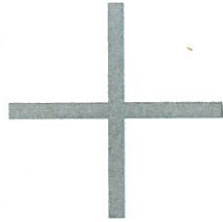


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1 old house + 1 old house = a new old house

The bones of a 250-year-old timber frame give shape to a new addition

A few years ago, when the McMansion wave was steadily rolling through the Northeast, the town of Wilton, Connecticut, decided to do something to slow it down. They created a Demolition Delay Ordinance, which requires any developer hoping to clear a lot by razing a historic building to publicly post their intentions and then wait 90 days. Among the first buildings protected by the rule was a timber-framed 1750 farmhouse located on Hurlbutt Street, one of Wilton's oldest thoroughfares.

On the other side of town, Marian Wulffleff and her husband, Doug, were talking with local architect Rob Sanders about adding on to their cramped 1772 Colonial. Though they loved the historical character of the three-bedroom house, the couple longed for a large, open kitchen and a



The Wulffleffs' 1772 Colonial (1) was combined with another 18th-century house (2), moved from a few miles away, to create a spacious home (3) that respects the past but meets the needs of a modern family.

BELOW: Exposed timbers salvaged from a 250-year-old post-and-beam house nearby add charm and a sense of history to an otherwise brand-new family room and dining area.



great room in which the family could gather. And while they'd spent 17 years and raised four kids in the house—the youngest was still at home—they'd never had a master suite with a private bath. But they were determined not to build a bland new addition that was incompatible with their existing house.

So when Marian stumbled across an editorial in the local paper that described the Hurlbutt Street house's plight, it was, as she describes it now, "the sledgehammer" that launched their project. "We just had to figure out how to add the house to our own," she

says. She immediately phoned architect Sanders, then jumped in the car to meet him over at the rundown house.

"As soon as Marian saw the house she fell head-over-heels in love," says Sanders. Not only did the structure date to the same period as the Wulffleffs' house, but it had a massive stone fireplace, a feature their home lacked. And although the structure's roof and clapboard siding were in disrepair, the chestnut framing underneath was still solid. They had little time to weigh their options, though: The house was scheduled to be demolished in a matter of weeks. So Sanders and

New Life for an Old Timber Frame

The 18th-century structure that the Wulffleffs salvaged for their addition was mere weeks away from meeting the wrecking ball when they acquired it. The prize of their efforts was the building's centuries-old chestnut post-and-beam framing, which they re-erected and used as the addition's structural skeleton.



(1) The first step in the dismantling process was to strip off the structure's failing roof. Then siding, windows, and doors were removed to expose the timber framing.



(2) The dismantled chestnut posts and beams were transported to a barn on the Wulffleffs' property and stored there.

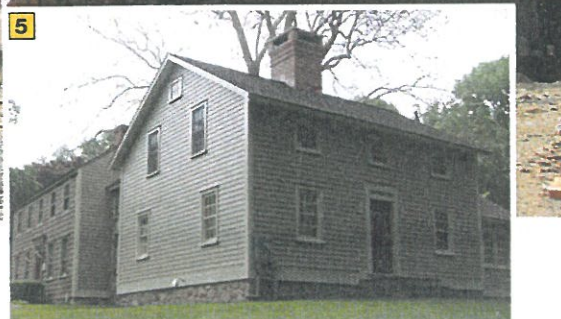
(3) The Wulffleffs' son Jim helped reframe the structure, often using an oversize mallet known to timber framers as a "persuader" to drive the mortise-and-tenon joints together.



(4) The addition was connected to the Wulffleffs' home at a 90-degree angle. All of the original timbers were reused for the wall framing, though new lumber was required for the roof.

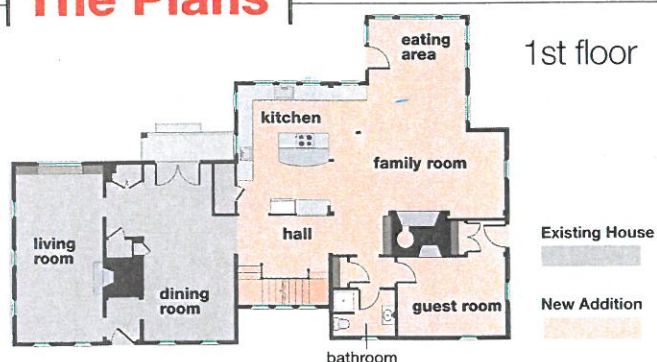


(5) Keeping the addition's front door intact helps preserve the distinct identities of the two merged structures.

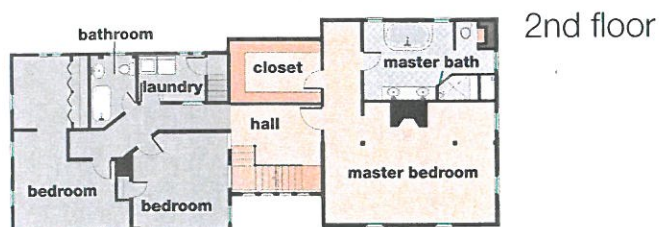




The Plans



The two structures are linked by a hallway, which also contains a staircase leading to the second floor and basement. The guest room and bathroom were designed as a self-contained suite.



The upstairs of the addition is taken up entirely by the master bedroom, bathroom, and a walk-in-closet. One of the existing house's bathrooms was converted into a laundry room.

the Wulffleffs paid a visit to the property's owner. "He was happy to have someone take the house off his hands," says Sanders. "He even loaned us heavy equipment to speed things up."

TURNING TWO HOUSES INTO ONE

Sanders went back and took some quick measurements, then sketched out a floor plan. Connecting the Hurlbutt Street house to the Wulffleffs' would maintain the historical integrity of both 18th-century homes, and leaving the rebuilt chestnut timber framing exposed would lend the modernized spaces a time-worn feel. By orienting the addition at a 90-degree angle to the existing house, the Hurlbutt Street house's central stone fireplace could be more easily integrated into an open-plan kitchen and family room on the first floor, and there would still be enough space for a guest room and a bathroom. The second floor would be reserved for the master suite.

Of course, putting two houses together on paper is one thing; actually pulling it off is quite another. Sanders turned this challenge over to contractor Don Frank, who, coincidentally, had begun his career as a timber framer after watching Norm Abram

TOP: The Wulffleffs chose windows instead of upper cabinets, so the kitchen is flooded with sunlight. **INSET:** The homeowners fashioned the island's countertop from leftover 250-year-old chestnut flooring.



ABOVE: The heart of the family room is a fireplace rebuilt with some of the original stones. The mouth of a brick-lined beehive oven, used for baking, can be seen at the back of the firebox. Stairs lead to the second floor, and a hallway connects to the original house. **LEFT:** The old firebox before it was disassembled.

and the *This Old House* gang raise a post-and-beam barn in Concord, Massachusetts (see *This Old House Classics*, page 136), more than a dozen years ago.

It took Frank three weeks to peel away the Hurlbutt Street house's siding and plaster, pop out windows and doors, pull up floorboards, and ultimately uncover the frame. He tagged and numbered each timber, then dismantled the frame and drove the pieces over to the Wulffleff property. Taking the structure apart and moving it cost only \$7,000—less than what it would have cost to purchase similar materials from an antique-lumber dealer or to have new timbers cut.

Before the two old houses could be joined, the Wulffleff house's existing single-story kitchen addition had to be demolished. To help with the demolition work, Frank hired Jim, an eager 27-year-old who

was fresh out of law school—and is one of the Wulffleffs' three sons. "I'd always been mechanically inclined, and the job market was slow, so this was a chance to do something different," says Jim.

He began as a laborer, carting shingles and plaster to the trash as the crew tore down the old addition. "The other guys got a kick out of seeing a lawyer walking around inside a Dumpster, compacting the trash," he says. A few weeks into the demo work, Frank gave Jim a book on post-and-beam construction, and pretty soon Jim was helping him reframe the Hurlbutt Street house.

RAISING THE ADDITION

Although the majority of the frame was in good condition, a few of the centuries-old posts had water damage at the base. Frank and Jim replaced the rotted wood with oak, which they scarfed in place and stained to match the chestnut. To replace the frame's lone missing post (a casualty of a previous remodel), Frank purchased a massive oak timber at a nearby salvage yard and turned it over to Jim to cut and mortise.

Once all of the timbers had been reassembled on the ground, Frank's crew raised the frame and the Hurlbutt Street house was reborn as the Wulffleffs' "new" addition. To make room for an informal eating area off of the family room, they bumped out the rear of the addition using the frame of the torn-down kitchen, which they



had salvaged during the demolition process. "It was a building-block approach," says Sanders of piecing the various frames together. The entire addition wound up doubling the house's living space, to 4,600 square feet.

While Frank and his crew built 2x6 stud walls between the timber posts, sheathed the whole frame with plywood, and installed new six-over-six windows, masons filled in the transition between the two houses. The space is essentially a light-filled hall and stairwell sheathed in a fieldstone veneer. "We wanted to connect the Wulffleff and Hurlbutt Street houses together without losing sight of the fact that they were, historically, two distinct buildings," says Sanders. "The stone helps differentiate the two."

Equally impressive is the family-room fireplace, which the masons rebuilt using a combination of salvaged stones and ones collected from the Wulffleffs' property, including a rough-hewn 6-foot-long lintel uncovered in the woods.

The last batts of insulation went in on the snowy Christmas Eve morning of 2002. "We threw two sheets of plywood on top of some sawhorses, put a few pine boughs in the center, and had dinner in front of a roaring fire," says Marian. "It was magical."

ABOVE: The master bedroom's old timbers were left exposed for effect but are capped by a cathedral ceiling framed with modern materials.

RIGHT: After raising four children, the Wulffleffs finally got the private master bathroom they had always wanted.

FINISHING THE INTERIOR

After New Year's, Frank turned to the interior. Because Marian wanted the kitchen to have views of the backyard, she decided to forgo upper cabinets in favor of windows. To provide needed storage and play off of the addition's timeworn exposed framing, the kitchen was designed around three freestanding pieces of vintage furniture: a large, glass-fronted cherry china cabinet; a general-store counter outfitted with oversized drawers; and a cherry butcher's table. "I made big cardboard cutouts of each piece," says Marian. "I moved them around on the floor until I got it just right." Custom Shaker-style lower cabinets with honed granite countertops fill in the gaps between the pieces. There was just enough old chestnut flooring to outfit the guest room; the kitchen and the rest of the addition have new pine flooring, which Marian and Doug had stained to match the weathered pine in the existing portion of the house.

The second floor of the addition is taken up by a back-to-back master bedroom and bath, and a big walk-in closet. To meet code and make room for insulation, Frank framed the roof as a cathedral ceiling, using modern techniques and materials. But he left the mortise-pocked wall timbers exposed to visually tie the rooms to the rest of the structure.



For everyone involved, the project reinforced just how much reusing old materials—and preserving two-and-a-half-centuries worth of history in the process—was the right thing to do. With new construction, the Wulffleffs admit, they could have gotten twice the space for the same price. "Instead," says Marian, "we opted for a million times the charm." ■

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