

Faux Farmhouse

Pastoral on the outside, this house has an interior that blends

BY JOHN W. LINDSEY

I first met Lex and Ann Alexander more than 20 years ago when I helped them design a grocery store. Since then, I've designed three stores for them as well as several other projects. During the time that we've known each other and worked together, we have reached the understanding that originality and whimsy, detail and craftsmanship, and good design and function would be inseparable components of any venture we undertook. So I was delighted and excited when the Alexanders asked me to design their house.

An old barn provides inspiration

Like many clients, Lex and Ann collected magazine clippings and other images showing styles and ideas they liked. Among all those things, I was surprised to find a small photo of a run-down barn on a nearby country road. That barn happened to be my favorite local building.

Beautifully proportioned, this barn's two-story gabled central section was flanked on both sides by one-story sheds. The barn became the point of departure for the Alexanders' new house, one that sits on its site with a sense of purpose and the feel of a working farm building (photo above).

We phased construction over a five-year period. The house came first; the proportions of its central core are the same as the barn we admired. Next came the garage/workshop,

Photo above: Seth Tice-Lewis

finely crafted details with industrial elements in a whimsical whirl

followed by a breezeway (photo right). The garage and breezeway are simple gable structures with unpretentious exterior detailing. The assembly of buildings, the garage, the breezeway and the residence with metal siding glinting in the sunlight, resembles a collection of farm structures (floor plan, p. 85).

An interior for social gatherings

Industrial/agricultural-grade materials and fixtures can be found in almost every part of the



Fee fie faux farm. *Inspired by a photo of an old North Carolina barn, this house sits on its site like a farm building that has been there for years. Photo taken at A on floor plan.*

Breezeway bunny. *A 6-ft. rabbit with a 2-ft. carrot welcomes you to the breezeway that connects the house and garage. Photo taken at B on floor plan.*



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house. For example, commercial light fixtures (“Sources,” p. 85) illuminate the unpainted welded-steel frame supporting the breezeway’s galvanized roof. A couple of steps take you to the tread-plate steel front porch that is the main entry to the house.

An airlock entry with closets on each side helps to keep conditioned air inside the house where it belongs. The entry foyer, paved with milled Vermont slate, provides an elevated view of the living and dining rooms.

The kitchen is just inside the foyer, open to the living and dining areas (photo above). The kitchen cabinetry, made by artisans at Aventine Inc., includes ebonized maple panels, and a kitchen peninsula is capped with a maple-veneered counter in the shape of Pac-Man.

The foyer steps down to the living and dining rooms, which are combined in one large, open space for social functions. A large window in the dining room offers woodland views from the table. A buffet of maple and lacewood tucks into the corner of the dining room where the wall meets the stair.

In the living room, a masonry fireplace with stainless-steel chimney dominates the east wall (photo p. 84), its warmth radiating easily to the steel spiral stairs 25 ft. to the west.

Oversize steel beams on steel posts lend an industrial flavor while framing the living-room space and supporting the second-floor areas.

A spiral staircase from the basement to the second floor is the principal feature in the living room. From the main floor, it leads to a second-floor balcony library. Separate offices for Lex and Ann adjoin the library.

Add a large helping of whimsy, and stir gently

When you walk into the breezeway at the Alexanders’ house, you know you’re in for a different sort of treat. A 6-ft. fiberglass rab-

FUNNY AND FANCIFUL FACETS





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In this house, sculpture and whimsy begin with the 1 Pac-Man-shaped maple counter in the kitchen (photo facing page). 2 (Photos clockwise, this page) Steel beams begin in the kitchen and run through the living room beside an amusement-park staircase. 3 A curved shelf and a croquet ball in the stair skirt make a perfect display area for sculpture. 4 Fake beams made of MDF hang over a powder-room sink and 5 wrap around friezes in the living room. 6 A shiny bowling ball on a kitchen shelf adds a fun sculptural note. 7 And stars are everywhere, including a double-star corner block in the dining-room window casing.



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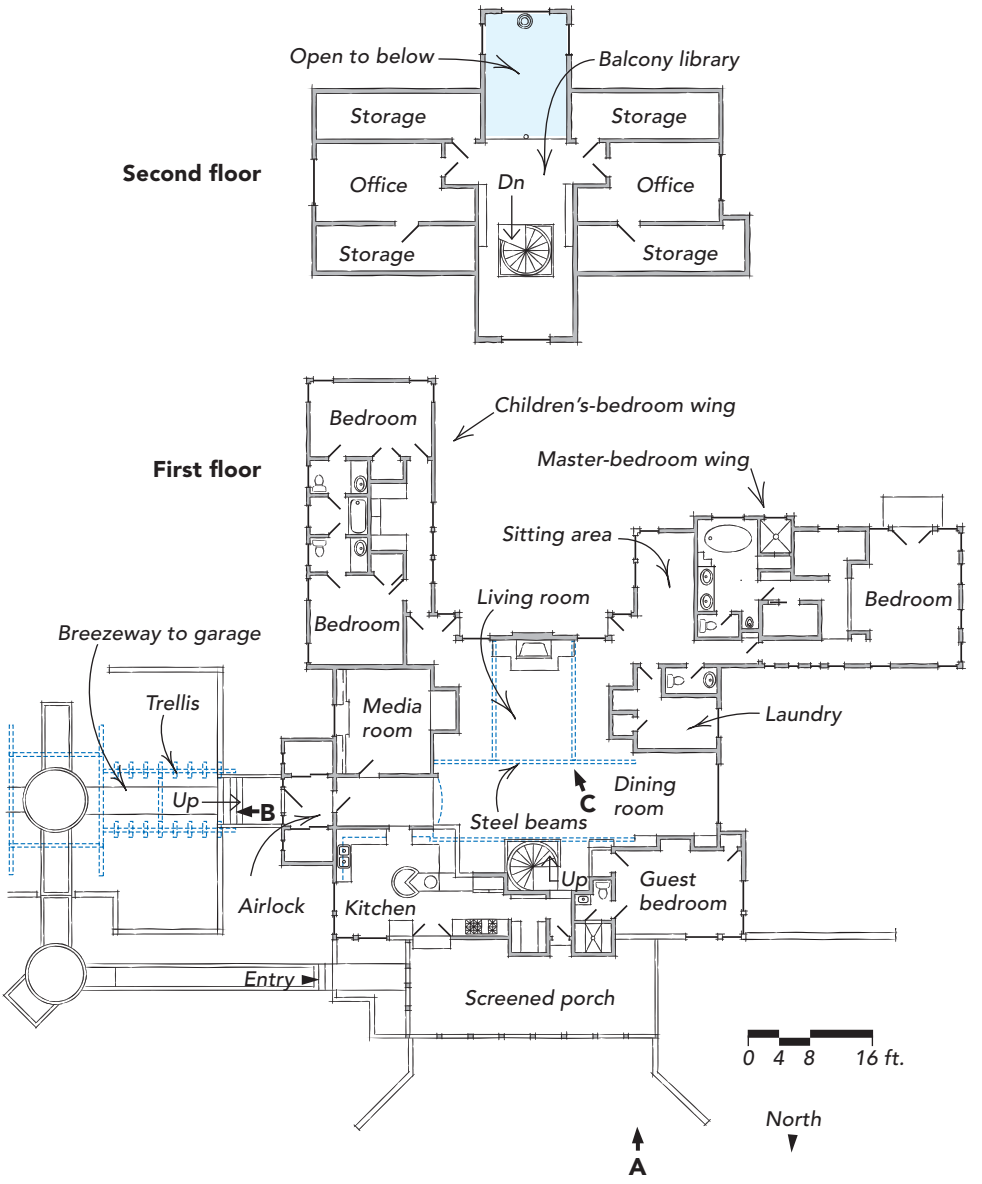




Framed in steel. *The industrial look of the steel beams continues into the living room, where the beams support a soaring two-story space over a masonry fireplace. Photo taken at C on floor plan.*

OPEN PLAN FOR FUN AND ENTERTAINMENT

A wide-open living area on the first floor allows plenty of space for large groups of guests. Doorways in the foyer and stair area allow visitors access to the screened porch while circumventing the busy parts of the kitchen. Bedrooms are in separate wings for privacy and quiet.



SPECS

Bedrooms: 4

Bathrooms: 2 full, 1 half, 1 one-and-a-half

Size: 5100 sq. ft.

Cost: N/A

Completed: 2001

Location: Chapel Hill, North Carolina

Designer: John W. Lindsey

Builder: Frank Cole Building Co. (house), Aaron Construction Co. (garage and breezeway)

bit, one of the grocery-store mascots, chewing on an oversize carrot greets you.

Inside the house, one of the first things you see is a black bowling ball on a shelf bisecting the kitchen (photos p. 83). I try to sneak a bowling ball into every project I undertake. Its unexpected color and shape instantly heighten awareness of the finishes, shapes and materials around you.

Steel I-beams are as much a part of the trim as they are of the structure (photo 5, p. 83). But using real I-beams for trim would have been a backbreaking exercise. Instead, I made faux beams out of medium-density fiberboard (MDF) and painted them to look like steel.

The baseboard design, juxtaposing mahogany and maple with a painted shoe molding, rides a track between playful and mischievous. The parallel steel rails that make up the balustrade of the spiral stairs take on a Coney Island quality.

In this corner of North Carolina, people know me as the "star man" because stars find their way into my work. A large mahogany star is inlaid into the maple floor and geographical center of the living area. Closer inspection reveals star corner blocks for most of the door and window casing. In some places, mahogany stars are set into maple, and in other places, the species are reversed.

My favorite celestial sculpture is a section of beam that cantilevers over the sink in the powder room. This sculptural beam is made of MDF with a large star cut into it. And stars over the main entry doors bid visitors a cheerful farewell. □

John W. Lindsey is a sculptor and designer in Raleigh-Durham, NC. Photos by Roe A. Osborn, except where noted.

Sources

- Masonry fireplace (Isokern; 800-642-2920; www.isokern.net)
- Spiral staircase (Stairways Inc.; 800-231-0793; www.stairways.biz)
- Commercial lights (Holophane, Century series PGRL; www.holophane.com; 740-345-9631)

Floor-plan drawings: Paul Perreault