

# build + remodel

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In their transformation of a century-old log cabin in Chevy Chase, Bonstra | Haresign Architects designed a two-story addition. Daylight filters from the second floor to the basement via glass ceiling and floor panels and a new staircase with open risers.



# STUDY IN CONTRAST

*Bonstra | Haresign Architects enhances a rustic log cabin in Chevy Chase with a dynamic, modern addition*

Text by DEBORAH K. DIETSCH | Photography by ANICE HOACHLANDER



The 1919 house began life as a log cabin (opposite, bottom), and was later clad in stone (opposite, center). Bonstra | Haresign Architects expanded it with a gabled addition (this page and opposite, top). New cypress cladding relates to the home's original log structure.



2019



2013



1926

**R**ustic and modern meet in this renovation of a century-old log cabin in the Chevy Chase neighborhood of Somerset. The original structure has been preserved and complemented by a clean-lined addition clad in cypress. The expansion updates the home with much-needed improvements, including a master suite and a kitchen with access to a new concrete patio.

“I wanted to bring light and open spaces to the house,” says homeowner Maya Weil, a legacy fundraising consultant for arts organizations. “All the rooms used to be small, chopped up and dark, even on the brightest day. I didn’t want to lose the character and charm of the house, but I wanted to make it feel more joyful and livable.”

Weil spent part of her childhood in the home, which was owned by her mother, journalist Margaret Lee Weil, who worked for *The New York Times* and NBC News, and as a foreign correspondent for United Press International. “This was a great place to grow up, full of life,” recalls Maya Weil, who now shares the house with her nine-year-old daughter Maggie. “My mom had an open-door policy and the house was always full of neighborhood kids and gatherings of interesting people.”

Renovation Architecture: **David Haresign, FAIA; Adam Greene, AIA**, Bonstra | Haresign Architects, Washington, DC. Kitchen Design: Kitchen & Bath Studios, Chevy Chase, Maryland. Contractor: Thorsen Construction, Alexandria, Virginia. Landscape Design: **Jennifer Horn, ASLA**, Jennifer Horn Landscape Architecture, Arlington, Virginia.



*“The modern spaces we added respect the scale and materiality of the historic home.”*

—DAVID HARESIGN

The airy addition features a dining area centered on a table made by Abernethy Sticks out of logs recycled from the house. The chairs are by Room & Board. Glass panels in the floor next to the new oak-and-steel staircase allow light to reach the basement. Designed in collaboration with Kitchen & Bath Studios, the open kitchen combines Christiana cherry and white-painted cabinetry with Marbled granite countertops. Pella folding glass doors open to the new terrace.





## drawing board

### Should an addition to a historic house blend or contrast with the original architecture?

David Haresign: We believe it should complement the original architecture while being clearly new. Understanding the original massing and materiality allows for successful designs that respect historic architecture and create a compatible whole.

### What is the easiest way to modernize the kitchen or bath in an old house?

DH: Replacing sinks, appliances and toilets but leaving them in the same location is easiest. However, modern fixtures are generally larger than old ones and updated building codes require more space than they used to. Refreshing a room's layout to conform to contemporary standards usually yields a better result.

### How do you preserve an older home's character during a renovation?

DH: Original features that bring a sense of craft and authenticity are worth preserving. Remodeling can be limited to functional areas like kitchens and bathrooms that need to be modernized for performance.



After her mother died in 1992, the house stayed in the family and Weil eventually moved back in. She began the renovation in 2015, working with David Haresign and Adam Greene of Bonstra | Haresign Architects. Haresign had previously remodeled and expanded a log cabin in Sperryville, Virginia; Weil was impressed with the finished project's mix of contemporary and historic elements. "The architects were able to combine the two without making the design look jarring," she explains.

In renovating the Somerset house, Haresign and Greene were challenged by its cedar-log architecture. The home was originally built in 1919 by a local dentist, who imported the timbers from Canada and hired lumberjacks from Quebec to assemble the structure. The building's exterior was later clad in stone to better fit the neighborhood. Inside, some of the logs were left exposed while others were covered in wood paneling and plaster.

Margaret Weil had bought the house from the dentist's daughter and, in the 1980s, had extended the kitchen, created a dining room and added a second-floor bedroom and bath. The architects left some of these alterations in place but upgraded the interiors and returned the historic parts of the home to working order. Stonework was repointed, oak floors refurbished and a geothermal heating and cooling system installed along with new wiring and lighting. Windows, which had been altered to accommodate air conditioners, were rebuilt to match their original appearance.

"We restored the portions of the log house that were the most historic and noteworthy," Haresign recounts. "The modern spaces we added respect the scale and materiality of the historic home and accommodate new systems throughout."

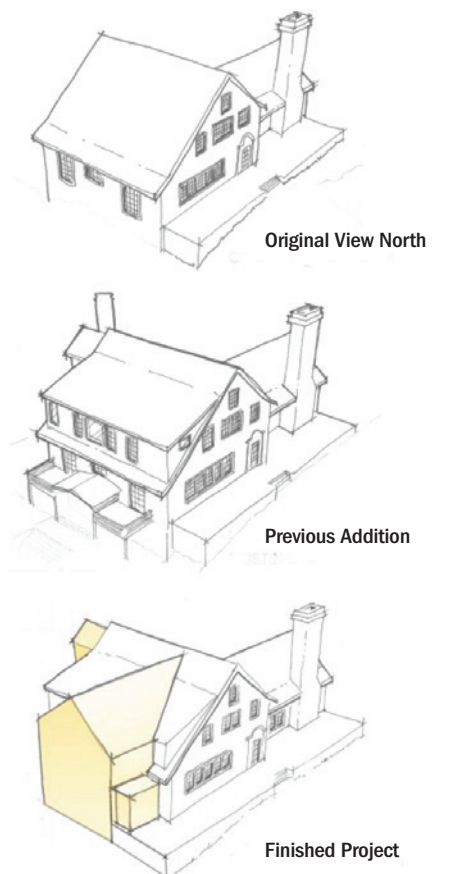
The only space where the exposed logs remain is the living room, which still

exudes the woodsy coziness of a mountain lodge. A porch off this room was enclosed with new window walls for year-round use.

Pulling off wainscoting to unearth the timbers in other parts of the house led the architects to revise their plans to unmask more logs. "In some places, the walls were out of square, which created difficulties," Greene explains. "So we framed new walls within the original structure to create rectilinear spaces."

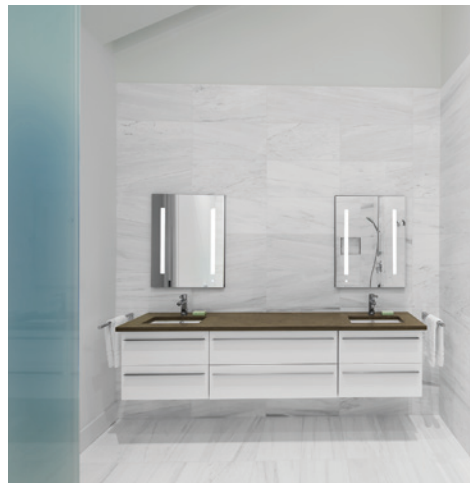
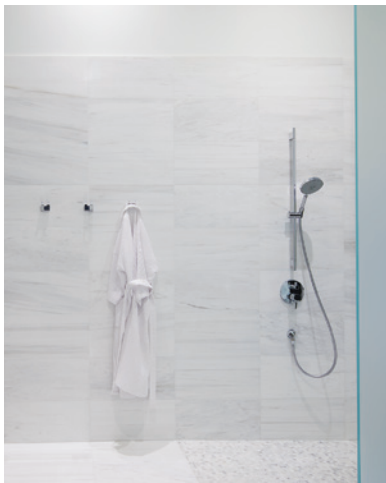
These new partitions resulted in the crisp design of the dining area and kitchen. This flowing, open space replaced the existing kitchen, two bedrooms, study and staircase, and added to the west end of the house.

The dining space centers on a table with a wooden top made from cedar logs removed from the home during the renovation. In the kitchen addition, folding-glass panels can be completely opened to the outdoor terrace.



Clockwise from opposite, top left: A minimalist fireplace replaced a clunky, dated one in the study at the rear of the house. The exposed timbers and stone fireplace in the living room were preserved to maintain a rustic, log-cabin look. The addition features a basement-level entrance. The kitchen/dining area is visible from the living room through a wide opening that connects the old and new parts of the house.





The new master bedroom (top) is located on the second floor of the addition at the west end overlooking the spacious front yard through tall windows. Furnishings include a bed from Room & Board. The adjoining bathroom (above, left and right) has floor tiles and a shower lined in marble from Stone Source. The vanity is from Porcelanosa.

On one side of the transformed space, a new staircase up to the second-floor bedrooms is anchored along a vibrant, teal-painted wall. A skylight in the roof above the stairs filters sun through glass panels set into the first and second floors and down to the remodeled basement.

The architects initially intended to expose the original joists on the second

level, but found they had been compromised through later additions of plumbing and electrical systems. “Once it was determined that the joists could not be saved, we raised the level of the second floor by six inches, allowing for taller ceilings on the main level,” says Greene.

A peaked ceiling and tall windows create an airy feeling in the second-floor master bedroom, housed within the addition. “The master suite and kitchen used to be at the rear of the house,” notes Haresign. “Our goal in relocating these spaces was to orient them to the views of the expansive front yard.”

Weil, who is a violinist, now holds concerts and social gatherings in the house. “The openness of the main level makes it great for entertaining,” she says. “My favorite place to sit is in the log living room, looking through to the modernized dining and kitchen area with the glass ceiling and floor panels. The architects did a fantastic job of making the juxtaposition of old and new feel seamless.” ■