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'Green' house

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Builder repurposed old-barn lumber for new energy-efficient home

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Kiln-dried cedar boards that once formed the walls of an old tobacco barn were repurposed as wainscoting, chair rail and cap, baseboards and window casings in the family room and two bedrooms of the 2,000-square-foot farmhouse.



Even though some of the wood was rotted and the foundation weak, Lexington home builder Gatewood Arnold couldn't bring himself to eradicate the 40-foot-by-60-foot tobacco barn.

It had stood for seven decades on the Athens-Boonesboro Road property he bought in 2005.

"I couldn't just take it down," Arnold said. "I had to use it somehow."

So two years ago, he and employees of his home construction and remodeling business, built a 10-foot-by-18-foot treehouse with wood salvaged from the barn and windows and doors from a remodeling job.

"They were going to be thrown away, and I said 'I know where we can use those.'"

Gatewood James, 13, and Stapleton, 12, had no idea what their dad was up to until the unveiling at a birthday party.

"Everything's out of square, everything's crooked — and the clients love it," he laughed.

A 41-foot-long bridge, made of rope and cedar logs, connects the front porch of the treehouse and the platform for a 100-foot-long, 16 mph zip line. A flat, grassy clearing a few yards away accommodates volleyball, corn hole, horseshoes and campouts. Trails threading throughout the 7-acre property increase the fun factor.

"We have kids out here all the time," Arnold said of the outdoor retreat.



A 41-foot-long bridge, made of rope and cedar logs, leads to the front porch of a treehouse built with wood salvaged from an old barn that once stood on the property.

MIX OF OLD AND NEW

Arnold began developing the property in 2008.

“I would come out here at night, work two to three hours at a time, and cut a path through the woods. It helped me get a better view of the property,” Arnold said. “I’d also dream a little bit. I wanted to have the option to add on to the house in a couple of years, so both the way the house is sited and the floor plan had to accommodate that.”

Meanwhile, Gatewood James, running low on patience, offered to help.

“My son said ‘Dad, I have \$300 in my bank account. You can have it if you will start the house,’” his father recalled. “He’s been very passionate about this place. We’ve had a lot of good times here.”

Kiln-dried cedar boards that once formed the old barn’s walls were repurposed as wainscoting, chair rail and cap, baseboards and window casing in the family room and two bedrooms of the 2,000-square-foot farmhouse completed in June 2011. Handrails made of cedar logs add folksy charm to the deck and front porch.

“I’m a history buff,” Arnold said. “I love the fact that the wood came from right here on the property.”

On the main level, slate floors lead to a four-bay garage, one of which serves as the perfect bedroom for a 13-year-old nature enthusiast. Gatewood James raises the garage door during warm weather to enjoy a panoramic view of the back yard and woods. Screen wire covering the opening keeps out pests.

“He’s already said that if we add on to the house, he’s not moving. He’s made that very clear,” said Arnold, a single dad.

The Arnold family: Stapleton, 12, Gatewood and Gatewood James, 13.

On either side of the family room is a large bedroom, each separated by heavy curtains that can be pulled closed for privacy.

A garage bay serves as a one-of-a-kind bedroom for Gatewood James, who can raise the garage door, which is screened.



Another reason for his son's desire to stay put could be the nearby 20-foot-tall firefighter's pole.

"The kids like it, and it is a convenient way to get to the garage from upstairs," Arnold said.

The top of the pole is one level up, just off the 18-foot-by-20-foot family room.

"We love to watch movies together, so I designed this room from the TV out," Arnold said.

Heavy fabric curtains stretch 20 feet across either side of the family room to conceal bedrooms belonging to Arnold and daughter Stapleton.

"If I build an addition, all I have to do is take down the curtains to create one big game room," he explained.

With six skylights and six windows, the family room puts on a show of its own in summer.



The roof of the treehouse can be seen through the trees from the second-story deck.

Arnold's home office is neatly tucked inside an armoire at the top of the staircase.

"All you can see when you look out these windows is greenery, so the place has a treehouse feel to it."

RETHINKING SPACE

Moving from a larger 4,000-square-foot house required careful consideration of the best use of space.

"I analyzed how we were living and what we were using," Arnold said. "Formal dining room? We don't need that. Office? I can cut that down, too. We don't need a kids' TV room and a family room. I don't need a living room."

Instead of having a separate home office, Arnold has an armoire tucked into an alcove at the top of the second-floor stairway.

"I have a computer and a printer in there, and that's all I need," he said.

Open to the family room, the compact kitchen has bar seating, eliminating the need for a separate dining area. To conserve energy, Arnold installed geothermal heating and cooling, foam insulation and energy-efficient Andersen windows.

He worked with interior designer Holly Hanna to pull everything together. Pre-finished hardwood floors with a soft, rustic patina complement the barn wood trim in the family room.

"It has a really good, rich brown color and a slightly worn look," Arnold said.

He also opted for a textured knock-down finish for the walls that have a distinctive old-world look.

"The barn wood is so rough, it seemed odd to me to have smooth drywall in here. I felt it was important to keep the details as authentic looking as possible."

Whether or not Arnold ever adds on to his meticulously constructed house built with such care and planning, his family now have what they consider the perfect place to call home.

"This is the dream," Arnold said. ■



A gated 20-foot-tall firefighter's pole provides quick descent to the first floor.

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