

## Design

# Old Field: Classic/Modern Home Graces Historic Land In Orange County

By Diane Lea

It is rare that a modern house can be described as classic. The convergence of architecture, craftsmanship, fine materials and a compelling setting associated with that term is hard to come by. Architecturally, a classic house harkens back to precedents distinguished by an established degree of excellence. The design follows a careful order based on thoughtful symmetry and proper proportion, and the setting provides a successful integration of house and landscape.

In 2005, Tom and Kathie Heffner, a development team whose career in Orange County spans 30 years, set out to build their own classic residence in the close-in but rural North Field neighborhood, an enclave of 11 custom-designed homes and convenient to both Chapel Hill and Hillsborough from NC Highway 86.

"We'd been working with this tract of land for six years," says Tom. "We'd been aware of it long before that."

The parcel of 460 acres, known as the Johnston tract, is part of 1200 acres in colonial Orange County granted to the Johnston family by George II in 1756.

"We were finally able to purchase the tract from the James M. Johnston Charitable Trust in 1999," says Tom.

He and Kathie, along with Tom's business partner Rolf Sass, created the neighborhoods of Creek Wood and North Field from 200 acres of the Johnston tract and worked with the Triangle Land Conservancy (TLC), a local land trust, to add the remaining 260 acres to other land TLC had acquired to form the Johnston Mill Nature Preserve. The preserve opened to the public in 2001.

The site that Tom and Kathie chose for their own residence was a beautiful 16-plus acre level field.

"We called it Old Field to honor the fact that it was probably one of the last cultivated land tracts that had been continuously farmed since the 1700s," says Tom.

### American Classic

The site resonated with the Heffners for many reasons, including their discovery of Windy Hill, a Manor Normande residence in Columbus, MS. The Heffners' passion for reading about and visiting architectural treasures throughout the United States introduced them to the home, created by a team of designers headed by Ken Tate, a well-regarded architect and proponent of the new traditionalism movement. Its setting is remarkably like a larger version of Old Field. The Heffners borrowed Windy Hill's horizontality, its disaggregated form and materials reminiscent of those historic family homes that grew over generations, and a satisfying integration of house and setting. However, true to their roots in Western North Carolina, the Heffners chose to create an American Classic, calling upon the character and architectural elements of Asheville's popular Craftsman Style Cottage to define their residence. (Tom calls it Arts and Crafts with a French influence.) It was an inspired choice, making use of architecturally, well-articulated detailing in contrasting materials that reflect the painstaking craftsmanship of an earlier time.

Working with designer David Kenoyer of KDK Design and landscape architect Tom Hunter, both of Raleigh, the Heffners set about to create a home that combines the best of modern energy-efficient building technology and the grace and charm of hand-crafted materials and construction. Jim Doran, a native of Ireland and master carpenter, was the job superintendent during construction of the approximately 7500-square-foot house. The porches, a key design element for Old Field, add 1149 feet and expand the home's outdoor living spaces to include a sweep of welcoming terrace on the front elevation and two distinctly different porches, one with an exterior fireplace, on the rear elevation. Handmade brick from Old Carolina Brick Company, laid with a custom mortar, were blended to create a combination of a darker brick with clinkers for the kitchen wing, which features an herb garden walled with open brickwork, and a traditional red brick interspersed with the darker brick for the residence's main block. The subtle colors and patterns of the brick blend nicely with the shades of gray in the slate roof and add to Old Field's appealing "layers" of texture. The tall, hipped roof of the residence's core is flanked by wings featuring gabled and pyramidal roofs. The rambling horizontality of the home is enhanced by dormers with well-articulated window hoods, tall-stepped chimney stacks, pairs of beautiful French doors, and large-scale bayed and arched windows.

Bathed In Light



Old Field is that rare traditional-style house that is bathed in natural light. The entry, flanked by tall mahogany French doors with transoms, custom designed by Architectural Traditions in Tucson, AZ, opens to a central foyer with access on the left to the spacious living room. To the right is the dining room, sheathed in raised panel antique heart pine. But the real eye-catcher is the soaring hand-crafted staircase by Durham's Rodney Ward, who designed all the home's interior woodwork. The intricately curved staircase is showcased by light from the window at the top of the stair landing and by the sheen and depth of tone in the 7 1/2-inch Brazilian cherry floors, which flow through much of the house. The living room extends from the French doors on the front terrace to the French doors that open onto the home's main rear terrace. The light from these tall doors floods the room with brightness, complementing the white painted coffered ceiling, the deep Brazilian cherry floors and the true masonry custom fabricated stone fireplace from Atlanta's François & Co. The effect is lightness and comfort with serene views of the surrounding terraces and meadows.



Old Field is, like all effective architecture, designed along axes. Even the powder room, placed discreetly off a soffit arch that disguises a coat closet and the powder room's foyer, is on an axis with the front entry. The powder room, like most of the home's bathrooms, features a refitted antique chest as a vanity basin. A transverse hall just beyond the soffit arch leads to the left toward the master suite and to the right to the family room, breakfast room and kitchen.

The master bedroom wing continues the themes of serenity, light and great views. The bayed window encompasses a sitting area and overlooks the meadow and the sky where night-time star-works often appear. The master suite flows into a bathing and vanity area equipped with a Bain Ultra air jet tub. The view from the tub matches the home's other vistas. Tile is everywhere. The discreet tones of pale creams and antique grays in the tile and the intricate designs laid in the floor, shower cabinet and tub surrounds are reminiscent of Roman baths before Vegas reinterpreted them. Everything is soothing. Handsome cabinetry graces the his-and-her closets, and an exercise room adjoins the suite.

Returning to the hall and turning into the family room, the sense is of soaring light with views not only of the lovely meadow bordered with trees, but also of a carefully constructed brick bordered grass court — and a vision of white-clad croquet players immediately comes to mind. The simplicity of the smooth walls and tall bowed window is perfectly in tune with the heavy bracketed carved fireplace surround that is the focus of the room. Created by Old World Stoneworks in Dallas, TX, the fireplace surround is substantial enough to bring the soaring volume of the room to comfortable human scale.

#### Delightful Spaces

One of Old Field's most delightful interior spaces is the elongated breakfast room and kitchen that form one continuous space with nature seeming to be visible at every turn. The breakfast room, with tongue and groove mahogany ceiling and walls, is enclosed on two sides by floor-to-ceiling panels. The panels imitate doors but are fixed, and the view is of the fireplace terrace with its Old Carolina handmade brick floors and mahogany ceiling. The image is clearly reminiscent of early mountain resorts, and a copse of lovely trees on a rise beyond completes the scene. The kitchen features French limestone floors, also from Walker Zanger. Practical pantries and a butler's pantry, which connects to the dining room, fan off from a central space defined by an 18-foot ceiling and furniture quality cabinetry. The center island is custom built of alder with granite counter tops from Walker Zanger. A terrace overlooks the herb garden with its overflowing stone jar fountain and space for a grill or other outdoor appliance.



The upper level of Old Field is devoted to family and guest bedrooms and a spacious recreation room overlooking the front parking court. The bedrooms are large with the same meticulously designed and installed tile patterns in the private baths found in the master suite. Walk-in closets are spacious, and a small nursery is tucked into the northerly bedroom. The recreation room is prepared for a large screen, high definition television, and a billiard table is in place. It is currently the owner's at-home office and is lit by three walls of French casement windows.

Though the attention to detail in Old Field's design and construction is compelling, it is the easy relationship between house and land that links it with the historic architectural treasures it is patterned upon. A hybrid fescue meadow sweeps to the edge of the Johnston Mill Nature Preserve corridor, where there is ample room for a swimming pool and perhaps an orchard. A circular drive wends its way to the rear of the property and to the small barn that houses mowing equipment and guest quarters.

"We built the barn/guest house first," says Tom. "We worked with our interior designer Gay Eatman of Raleigh's Eatman's Carpets & Interiors to make the space as comfortable and livable as possible since Kathie and I were preparing to live in approximately 600 square feet while the house was being built."

The Heffner's dedication to quality construction extends to their "cozy" aerie, which features a living room with an efficiency kitchen equipped with fine quality mini-appliances, a bedroom and a nicely appointed bath featuring taverline from Walker Zanger. The wooden floors are Australian Cypress, and the walls and ceiling are individual board paneling that lends a rustic but substantial feel to the intimate space.

A tilled garden plot nestles against the wall of the barn/guest house waiting for Kathie's heritage tomatoes and a replanting of her mother's peonies brought from Western North Carolina. The view back from the barn/guest house to the rear elevation of Old Field is a scene that evokes memories of North Carolina's rural landscapes and the treasured homes that have occupied them through history. How nice of Tom and Kathie Heffner to have added their own.

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