



# Rural Roots





PHOTO: JONATHAN BONCEK

## THE FARMHOUSE IS BEING REINVENTED FOR MODERN TIMES, AND THE RESULTS PACK BIG APPEAL FOR BUYERS

By Stacey Freed

Residential architecture and design speak to homeowners and potential homeowners in a language that mirrors our times in everything from economic and political uncertainty to a desire for family connectedness to a need for ecological sustainability. For the past decade or so builders have seen demand for homes that are transitional, more pared down, less fussy. While this has occurred across all home design genres, modern farmhouse style has shown itself to be “the perfect in-between” for those who love tradition, history, and vintage yet still want homes that are fresh and contemporary, says Samantha Hart, group editor of media company Meredith Corp.’s luxury home portfolio, which includes the annual *Modern Farmhouse Style*.

Developers and builders are responding—and finding success—by offering homes built in the modern farmhouse vernacular. “If I’m building two types of houses in a current market, the farmhouse will be more popular,” says Bill Davidson, president of Davidson Communities and developer of The Oaks Farms, in San Juan Capistrano, Calif.

### NOT YOUR GRANDMA’S FARMHOUSE

Everything about the farmhouse, of course, is intended for utility and simplicity. The pitched roof sheds snow, and a deep porch enhances cross ventilation, manages solar gain, and offers a good spot for muddy boots. But today, homebuyers who want houses built in the farm style don’t necessarily live in a farming community. In fact, many so-called farmhouses are found in new suburban developments and as infill.

“We’re not building these for historical replication; we’re adding today’s design sensibilities and the best of what might feel modern to this traditional structure,” says Linda Pruitt, owner

**Gabled roofs and big porches are common to the farmhouse. Today’s modern versions, like the Creekside model at Freeman’s Point by FrontDoor Communities, in Charleston, S.C., draw on those features while modifying the home for its region.**



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of The Cottage Company. For example, “Farmers are pretty thrifty, and having a lot of big windows may not be something they would have indulged in,” she says. “But in today’s structures, especially here in the Pacific Northwest, we value light, and having an orientation to light is a key component.”

Other updated elements include cementitious boards instead of wood siding, tongue-and-groove flooring for the front porch, and the use of reclaimed materials. Inside, the current popularity of an open floor plan, use of natural materials, and a mix of rustic and industrial elements are perfect for the updated farmhouse look. “Our buyers want a big, beautiful kitchen with an island and room for a farmhouse-style table that can seat 10 or 12, and a nearby seating area for entertaining,” says Jay Kallos, vice president of architecture for Ashton Woods. “The farmhouse style can make that space fantastic. You can have a vaulted ceiling with exposed trusses. These spaces are not your grandma’s farmhouse.”

The danger for builders, notes architect David Kenoyer, principal at KDK Design Group, in Raleigh, N.C., who has been designing modern farmhouses for Raleigh’s Triangle area for more than a decade, is focusing on details that aren’t appropriate for the style. “[Some builders] will focus on their detail page,” he says, “and the overhangs are the same for all styles whether it’s a farmhouse look or a Queen Anne or a brick box with colonial detailing. It’s not truly farmhouse style; it’s a house [the builder] put details on.”

Farmhouse style exists in all areas of the United States, and it’s important to consider local history and architecture to get it right. The Oaks Farms, for example, focuses on the equestrian lifestyle in a region dotted with Spanish and Victorian architecture, Davidson says. Materials, too, vary by region. “In the Carolinas and Georgia, we may do frame houses,” Kallos says. “In Florida we use cement block on the floor and wood siding. In Texas we use brick and stone. In Phoenix it’s a stucco-friendly environment, but in each place we can create the look of a modern farmhouse—kind of country meets contemporary.”

Authentic farmhouse style depends mostly on scale. “Getting your proportions right—the scale of the porches, the fenestration—allows the house to speak for itself,” says architect Eric Mandil, owner of Mandil Inc., in Denver. “That’s the essence of the farmhouse. If you get that right, you nail it. When you get it wrong, it doesn’t work.”

### WHY NOW?

The recession and housing slowdown helped drive the trend says John Hart, owner of Hart Construction & Development, in Chapel Hill, N.C. “That was the end of the McMansion and the opulent excess that drove design,” he says. “There was a shift back toward simplicity and the art of knowing what to leave out, like ornate crowns and multilayered moldings,

The Anderson model by Ashton Woods is a modern farmhouse that has become an icon for its neighborhood, the Laureate Park master planned community in Lake Nona, Fla.



PHOTO: COURTESY ASHTON WOODS









**The Residence 2 model at The Oaks Farms, an equestrian community in San Juan Capistrano, Calif., by Davidson Communities, pairs farmhouse rooflines with rustic details and the traditional Spanish-style tile roofing common in southern California.**

heavy trim packages, opulent millwork, curved stairs, and Palladian windows.”

Despite all the talk about simplicity and clean lines, the farmhouse style isn’t really a cost saver when it comes to the build. Buyers are interested in what they perceive as authenticity. In the modern farmhouse, “there’s less detailing, but it’s all real and higher end. There’s no faux,” Davidson says. “Where there’s a countertop, it would be marble. Finishes tend to be authentic because of the market demand.”

With regard to current consumer interest in saving money on energy costs, the farmhouse’s usually smaller footprint is an advantage. The style also provides a nice palette for reused and historical materials, which places less demand on new sources of supply, says Bruce Hammond, president of Hammond & Company, in Penngrove, Calif., which focuses on sustainable design. “There are a lot of ways for recycled and salvaged materials to be part of this type of building.”

The desire for modern farmhouse style is also part of a larger cultural movement that includes farm-to-table eating, walkable community living, and a match-up of home with a more casual family lifestyle. “Walkability and connectivity [to the outdoors] are not passing references,” says Joan Marcus-Colvin, chief marketing officer for The New Home Company, which has offices

in the West and Southwest. Since traditional farmhouses were open to the land out of necessity (based on the ease of getting to the fields and back for lunch at that big table) the style fits well with today’s homeowners’ desire for access to the outdoors. (The American Institute of Architects’ 2016 Q2 design trend survey shows the continuing importance of outdoor living.) “If we’re not building in areas with [walkability and connectivity], we won’t be successful,” Marcus-Colvin says.

Meredith editor Hart sees, via social media, people gravitating toward nostalgic design—something that speaks to the past. “There’s a real appreciation for that in blogs, on Instagram, Houzz, and Pinterest,” she says. “There’s an appreciation for what has come before, but now it’s being pulled together in a more contemporary format. The farmhouse style is gaining momentum.”

### FARMHOUSE VERNACULAR, RECLAIMED MATERIALS

With a specific equestrian focus, Davidson Communities’ The Oaks Farms is a beach community about 12 miles from San Juan Capistrano in California. Homes are on 10,000-square-foot lots. In keeping with the equestrian ranch theme, lanterns light the streets. There are horse trails and a social barn with a huge fireplace and a platform for people to watch riders in the arena. “We lined up the houses as if we were building on the golf course, but

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we did this with a horse facility,” Davidson says. “You can look out and see people jumping their beautiful horses.”

For the modern farmhouse models, architect John McKee specified reclaimed boards in some homes for an authentic look. In the Residence 3 model, the adobe brick on one side ties into the vernacular, but the structure has the form and look, with its vertical siding, of farmhouses you may see anywhere in the U.S., McKee says. He chose unique finishes that, he says, “may be tied to lifestyle and not necessarily the structural style,” such as tongue-and-groove wood boards on the ceiling to mimic shiplap. There are exposed rafters and ridge beams, since, he adds, “there’s an honesty that you want to see in farmhouse style.”

### OLD FORMS MADE NEW

Located in Lake Nona, Fla., Laureate Park is a planned community with homes ranging from 2,705 square feet to more than 3,800 square feet built in a variety of styles. On their farmhouse-style homes, says Jay Kallos, vice president of architecture, Ashton Woods is using steel columns, Stikwood on accent walls, and exterior paint colors that range from traditional grays and beiges with pops of brighter colors, to the bold color palette of the now-iconic 2,400-square-foot farmhouse known as “Big Red.”

The homes have large kitchens with space for a 10-to-12-seat farmhouse dining table and vaulted ceilings with exposed trusses. “People are not looking at the farmhouse as value, but for what it does to the soul,” Kallos says. “It’s a comfortable shoe, but you can make it fresh.”

### PORCH AS FOCAL POINT

FrontDoor Communities is the developer and home builder (some lots were sold to Ashton Woods) of Freeman’s Point, a 130-lot waterfront community in Charleston, S.C., on James Island. Using a New Urbanist-style land plan, homes front to a street, are served by an alley, and play on the island’s natural surroundings. The modern farmhouse “is a popular style that fits the location,” says Mark Lipsmeyer, vice president, FrontDoor South Carolina. “Porches are a minimum of 8 feet deep and are oriented to take advantage of breezes, common areas, and water.”

To create the style, FrontDoor uses different exterior siding combinations—horizontal applications mixed with vertical board and batten—and uses gables. “We’ll also give an accent of a ‘reclaimed porch,’ where you turn part of a porch into conditioned space,” Lipsmeyer says. Inside, shiplap is used on trim, accent walls, and focal points such as stairwells and fireplaces. Reclaimed beams are used as fireplace mantles. Standard flooring is hardwood. Interiors are open, with barn doors as an upgrade option for flex spaces or master baths. Ceiling treatments such as board and batten in the kitchen are popular. **PB**

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The Oaks Farms’ Residence 3 model measures 4,400 square feet, with a tandem three-car garage and five bedrooms.

### KEEPING IT REAL

With many buyers eager for a particular style, production builders run the risk of creating a Disney-like development. David Arkin, principal at Arkin Tilt Architects, in Berkeley, Calif., offers these suggestions for creating a more authentic, unique result:

- Have a basic house plan or two and a kit of parts—bays, dormers, sliding shutters, porches—that can be added to address a certain view or solve a particular orientation’s shading needs. This will help ensure that houses have some variety—and in a way that acknowledges their specific site and climate.
- Extend common sense to the landscape to break from a cookie-cutter approach. For example, you’ll often find deciduous trees to the south and coniferous trees to the north and west of a prairie homestead. These were consciously planted to provide shade on summer days—in the afternoon, in particular—while welcoming low winter sun and tempering the worst of the winds. Planting in this way, once the trees are established, can also result in substantial energy savings.
- Look at vernacular buildings not only for local forms, but also for clues as to how buildings respond to that particular climate, with strategies for ventilation, shading, wind, and snow shedding. Slightly modifying each home so it makes sense of its setting and climate will result in a more authentic character.

The farmhouse is an iconic style. “In 10, 20, ... 100 years, it will still be here,” says David Kenoyer, principal at KDK Design Group, in Raleigh, N.C. “But it won’t be one of those houses [about which] people will say, ‘It’s from the early ‘90s with that big arched door and high ceilings.’” Architect Eric Mandil, owner of Mandil Inc., in Denver, agrees. “You don’t want people to say, ‘Oh, the farmhouse? They did that back in ‘16.’ [You need to consider] how well do they wear and how trendy will it be?” —S.F.