

Inside.  
Outside.  
Home.

# Abode cville

MARCH 2015

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In southern Albemarle,  
an Arts and Crafts estate  
branches out from tradition

# Time and place



# Embracing its place

An Arts and Crafts estate branches out from tradition

BY ERIKA HOWSARE, PHOTOGRAPHY BY VIRGINIA HAMRICK

In architecture, to honor tradition is no simple matter. But the land is a good place to start. Whatever materials are native to the site can become an indelible link between building and ground. Such was one of the goals at Green Mountain Station, where the Van Clief family has just settled into a brand-new house that nods to many different traditions, and its bucolic site, too.

Set on a 400-plus-acre tract in southern Albemarle, the house is meant not only to shelter its inhabitants—Alan and Cyndra Van Clief and their four children—but to create for them a way of life that is woven into the surrounding fields and woods. “We wanted a house that embraced its place,” said Cyndra.

From the homesite, they enjoy both complete privacy and long views, all the way to Carters Mountain, across a rolling landscape embroidered by creeks. “You come out in the morning and experience a panoramic view,” said Cyndra.

“We walked the entire property,” said architect Bruce Wardell, “and became interested in the boundary between two adjoining pastures,” where there was a remnant of an old railroad bed leading to the Alberene Quarry. At this, the eventual site of the house, “You come out in the morning and experience a panoramic view,” said Cyndra.

When they decided to move from their home of 16 years in Charlottesville, the Van Cliefs approached Wardell’s firm to create a house that would, like their previous home (designed by Milton Grigg), turn to tradition as a way of cen-

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tering itself in a place. Whereas Grigg’s homes are connected to Charlottesville by virtue of his impressive legacy here, the new house would grow from the Arts and Crafts tradition—not a widely imitated style locally, but, said Cyndra, one that is “at home here in Albemarle County.” The use of natural materials like stone and wood make it appropriate, she added, for a rural place.

So while this large house is meant to serve a very contemporary and active family, it includes many time-honored touches. For example, arched roof gables create spaces for semicircular windows, peaking beneath custom-designed rafter tails. The exterior is stucco with a terra cotta roof. “We used the stone to anchor the home to the ground, and developed a broad hipped roof with deep overhangs to provide a

CONCRETE ON PAGE 26



The exterior of Green Mountain Station is stucco with a terra cotta roof. The stone anchors the home to the ground, while the broad hipped roof provides a strong sense of shelter. At the front entrance in particular, “the roof extends forward over stone piers and heavy timber brackets to create an intimate scale where you enter,” said architect Bruce Wardell.



A high-ceilinged, light-filled room is sandwiched by the music room and dining room, and opens to the front entry hall. On either side of the central core, the house relaxes into greater informality, with the master suite at one end and the kitchen at the other.

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strong sense of shelter," said Wardell. "At the front entrance the roof extends forward over stone piers and heavy timber brackets to create an intimate scale where you enter."

## Stone on site

In a nod to very local conditions, the house makes extensive use of soapstone, a material that's still quarried very nearby and was available right here on the property. The stone shows up as sinktops, tile and walkways, tying the structure to its surroundings. One raw-edged soapstone piece forms a primitive-style backsplash for a powder room sink.

Kitchen cabinets are maple, flooring is red oak, and the main living space centers on a stone fireplace. Here is where many eras come together. The past lives in the room's formal symmetry and in the prominence of the hearth. Yet, as Cyndra put it, "The house is Arts and Crafts, pushing modern"—more contemporary notions being evident in the wall of glass and metal that surrounds the fireplace. Its mantel is hyper-local, and made of a repurposed rail in reference to the railroad that once crossed the property.

This high-ceilinged, light-filled room looks through glass on either side to a music room and a dining room. It also opens to the front entry hall, where stacked stone wraps the coat

closet and powder rooms. On either side of this symmetrical, central core, the house relaxes and bends into greater informality, with a master suite on one end and the kitchen on the other.

From the music room rises a dramatic steel and wood staircase with open treads. Wardell partnered with local sculptor John Rubino for its design. "John worked closely with us to create a staircase where the steel alluded to the railroad heritage of the site," said Wardell, "as well as the metalwork traditions common in the Arts and Crafts movement."

"We didn't want to have a big house and not use much of it," said Cyndra. That meant not

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having too many formal spaces. And with their kids ranging in age from 17 to 24, attracting them and their friends to spend time here was also a priority. “The home is convenient and comfortable for people to come and hang out in,” said Alan. Last summer, the couple’s son brought home some friends from college to help put up hay, and then the party gathered for dinner on the curved stone deck in the back.

Other times, guests avail themselves of the home theater in the basement, ping pong and pool tables or the poolhouse and hot tub a short walk from the house. When they inevitably end up hanging around the kitchen, they find themselves under a barrel-vault ceiling that makes the kitchen feel both spacious and cozy. A large central island, topped with granite, stands in contrast to the soapstone counters around the outside of the room. A soapstone woodstove radiates heat near the kitchen table.

The Van Cliefs are busy embracing their new rural lifestyle, planting berry bushes and fruit trees, observing hawks living near their creek, and above all, drinking in the views from every room of the house. “When we’re here,” said Cyndra, “we wanted to feel like there’s no place we’d rather be.”—*Erika Howsare*



## Poolhouse rock

Swimming being a favorite family pastime, the Van Cliefs decided to install an outdoor pool and poolhouse. And with these sited some distance from the main house, the poolhouse could have its own style, quite distinct from that of the home. Architects arrived at a design that, despite being distinctly modern, carries its own references to local tradition.

Tucked against a small hillside, the poolhouse is a bit like a springhouse from a traditional Virginia farmstead. Its curved roof dives nearly to ground level in the back, then soars up at the front to create an open wall that faces the pool.

Inside, the poolhouse reflects what the clients began to call it during the design phase: “The Spa.” Shades of green on the walls and floor were chosen to be reminiscent of lichen and moss. The ceiling is natural wood. A sauna and changing rooms line up along the back, while a large hot tub, deep enough to tread water in, occupies the front.

Its design is a recreation of a swimming hole in a soapstone quarry. Rather than climbing up, one steps down into it, a soapstone-tiled cube cut into the floor. Its rear wall is a sheer “cliff” of soapstone tile that continues underwater, like a quarry wall.—*E.H.*

## THE BREAKDOWN

10,000 square feet (main house), 900 square feet (pool house)

**Structural system:** Insulated concrete formed foundation; wood framing

**Exterior material:** Stone and stucco

**Interior finishes:** Oak flooring, painted gypsum wallboard, painted wood trim

**Roof materials:** Clay tiles

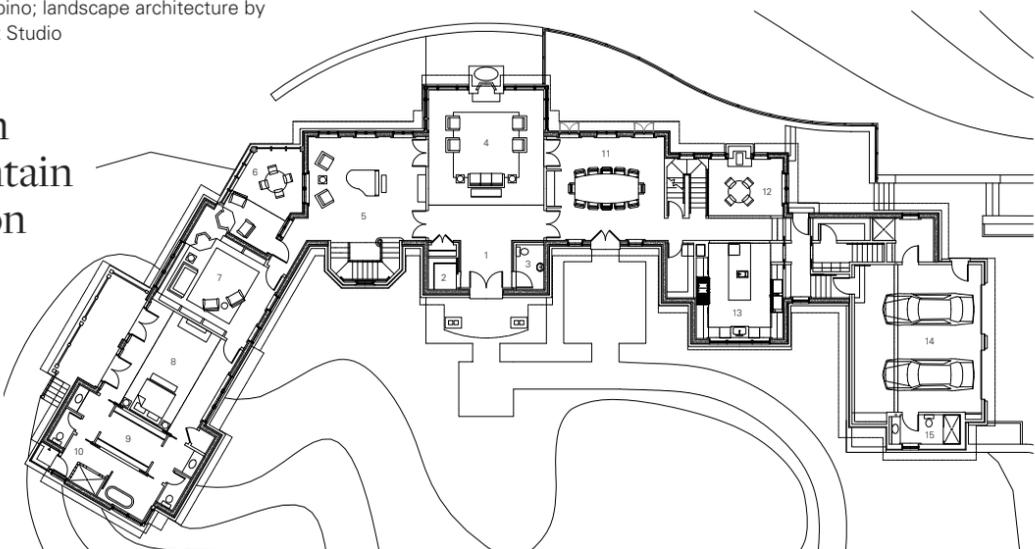
**Window system:** Marvin Windows

**Mechanical systems:** Geothermal heat pump

**General contractor:** Robb Construction

**Custom or innovation features:** Sculptural stair by John Rubino; landscape architecture by Waterstreet Studio

## Green Mountain Station



“The house is Arts and Crafts, pushing modern,” said homeowner Cyndra Van Clief. Kitchen cabinets are maple and flooring is red oak, while more contemporary notions are evident in the appearance of glass and metal. A dramatic steel and wood staircase with open treads, designed by John Rubino, extends from the music room.

### MAIN FLOOR

1. Entry Hall
2. Coat Closet
3. Lavatory
4. Living Room
5. Music Room
6. Screened Porch
7. Library
8. Master Bedroom
9. Closet
10. Bath
11. Dining Room
12. Family Dining
13. Kitchen
14. Garage
15. Bath

