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## Still Standing After All These Years

*An Old Stone House  
Dresses Up for a New Century*



By PATRICIA DANE ROGERS  
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**C**ivilizations may crumble, but stone endures. Consider, for example, a small stone building at the edge of historic Brookeville, built more than 200 years ago to house laborers of a nearby woolen mill.

Engulfed by change on all sides, surrounded by traffic-choked highways and acres of McMansions, the structure has survived to be rediscovered, reclaimed and recognized today as an architectural and preservation prize-winner.

Four years ago, Carol and Jack Bufton found the tumble-down little building—open to the elements and hidden among the vines and trees—on 25 heavily wooded acres left over from an upper Montgomery County subdivision.

The couple was looking for land near their grown daughter's family and intended to build a new house on the property. They hired Brookeville architect Miche Booz, and started working with him on plans for a small traditional house.

Booz, who is also an artist, had tramped all over the lot with his clients to site their new house and was taken by the rough-hewn beauty of the stone cottage buried in brush. That Christmas, he sent the Buftons a watercolor painting of the little dwelling as he imagined it had been in

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PHOTOS BY DAVID HARTIG

The stone ruin, center, is now the heart of the Bufton house, above right. The old chimney towers over the new living room wing, lower right. The living room fireplace is on the same wall, left.



# Weaving New Life Into a Mill Workers' House

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its heyday, with a two-tier front porch, a standing-seam metal roof and two tall stone chimneys.

The Buftons were so charmed with their architect's vision that they told him to forget the plans for a new house: *This* was the house they really wanted. "The new one was nice, but the stone had a resonance," Carol Bufton said.

The stone building, known as the Brookeville Mill Workers' House, stood on a hill overlooking a landmark woolen mill that made felt for blankets and clothing. The mill, located on the banks of the Hawlings River, operated from 1768 until 1931. It is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, as is the handsome stone miller's house a few yards behind it.

All three buildings, strikingly similar in construction, are presumed to date from the same time.

The Buftons were drawn to the site for its age and history, and for a more idiosyncratic connection: For years, the couple had maintained a small flock of sheep, which they raised for wool, at their home in nearby Dayton, and they planned to continue that hobby at their new house.

Booz (pronounced Bose) remembers his first glimpse of the little stone ruin. Trees and brambles were encroaching on all sides. A pile of rubble was all that remained of an exterior staircase. Part of the fireplace from the original kitchen stood to one side, with an 80-foot walnut tree growing between it and the house. Doors and windows were long gone, and so was the mortar. Vultures had laid eggs on the second floor and hissed when interlopers dared to approach.

But Booz remembers too his first impression of the integrity of the two-story building. "Basically the stonework was sound," he said. "The walls were still standing, and the corners were plumb—perfectly straight and true—a remarkable thing considering how long it had been neglected. It had not been lived in for 100 years."

Said Carol Bufton, a registered nurse, "It needed to be rescued."

It also needed to expand if she and her husband, a fiber-optics engineer, expected to live there. Each level had only one room, 20 feet long and 14 feet deep. The couple's goal—a two-bedroom, two-bath residence—was modest enough. But the challenge would be creating a livable plan in limited space while preserving the building's historic character.

Booz had several award-winning historic restoration projects to his credit, including Dodona Manor, the house museum in Leesburg once owned by Gen. George C. Marshall. And as the architect of the nearby Sandy Spring Museum, he seemed ideal for the job.

The Buftons wanted to bring life to his original



PHOTOS BY DAVID HARTGE

Christmas rendering, but also welcomed his new proposal: two small additions to flank the old stone building.

A one-story wing on one side would become a sunroom/living room. A two-story addition on the other would include a kitchen, incorporating the orphan fireplace, and a guest suite on the ground level; a master bathroom would claim the new space above. The first floor of the original structure would become a dining room, with a bedroom upstairs and a study in the attic above.

And there would be a two-story porch, just as the architect had imagined. Booz said an examination of the structure revealed evidence of "beam pockets"—holes for the timbers that supported the porch ceiling so long ago.

To craft additions that were distinct yet harmonious, Booz covered them with ochre-colored stucco, a material typical of 18th- and 19th-century buildings in the vicinity.

Gruber Building & Restoration, of Williamsport, Md., patched and replaced missing stonework, including the chimney of the kitchen fireplace, with mica schist from the local quarry.

The general contractor, Oak Grove Restoration Co. of Laytonsville, replaced floors, windows and woodwork with historically accurate materials: salvaged heart-pine planks, hand-blown glass set in muntins cast from period buildings. Hand-notched maple timbers duplicate 18th-century posts and beams. Batten doors were fastened with nails made with 19th-century tools.

Jack Bufton states that the "engineer in him demanded state of the art in heating and cooling," so radiant heat was installed below the ground-floor slabs; four fireplaces were fitted with gas logs, and a closed-loop geothermal system brought in as the main source of heating and cooling.

Last year, the Potomac Valley chapter of the American Institute of Architects took note of the finished product, heaping compliments upon both owners and architect: "The jury admired the restraint exercised . . . praising the result as quite elegant and modestly composed." The citation goes on to say that "this project appears to have resulted from a well-conceived desire to respect the existing building by not overwhelming it."

Which to Carol Bufton, is exactly as it should be.

It's a crisp fall day, and she's on the porch, gazing out toward the pasture and the idyllic scene of her grazing sheep. "I'm kind of in awe of the people who came before and built this house," she said. "It has to have been a difficult life. How did they drag the stones here, and how did they get the stones up so high? I'm really in awe of a stone building."



**A once exterior wall, right, is inside, visible behind the staircase.**

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