

Scott Porter's Chadds Ford Estate Reflects Equestrian Tradition

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As founder of Porter Construction, Porter's marriage of thoroughbred racing and home design is as seamless as it is gorgeous.

Eileen Smith Dallabrida // Photos by Ron Dubick

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The country home Scott Porter built for his wife and young twins is only a year old, yet it is steeped in history.

His architectural inspiration was the stately homes of Britain, which artfully combine soaring expanses with cozy niches. The estate, on a sylvan swath in Chadds Ford, is sited on property once owned by his brother, Cory. It is across the road from the home of their father, ardent thoroughbred owner Rick Porter.

"We are crazy about horses and racing and that shows in our home," he says.

Indeed. Vintage renderings of the Sport of Kings hang in the clubby, paneled first-floor study. Above the built-in bar in the expansive foyer is a portrait of jockey Ramon Dominguez, wearing the red-and-white silks of Rick Porter's Fox Hill Farm, which has raced such stellar steeds as Hard Spun and Eight Belles, both Kentucky Derby runners-up, and Havre de Grace, 2011 Horse of the Year.

Scott is the founder of Porter Construction, a custom home building and renovation firm. He has an innate talent for design, for creating houses that are both lovely and livable.

"When I was a boy, I would draw little houses," he recalls. "I would doodle rooflines."

The house where his brother once lived was heavily damaged by fire years ago. But the eight-acre parcel surrounding it offered such impressive infrastructure as a bridge over a rushing stream. A spring house provides irrigation for the grounds, including a three-hole golf course. A second spring house is sited beside a swimming pool with a rock waterfall. A large reflecting pond in front of the house mirrors trees and skies.

So when Scott was looking for a place for his own growing family, the location was a natural fit.

The original house had to be razed. The new owner retained what he could, maintaining the foundation and its footprint. Kitchen cabinets that had been spared from the flames were repainted and repurposed in the laundry room, which also features reclaimed Chicago bricks set in a herringbone pattern. Stone from the facade was salvaged and integrated into chimneys and exterior walls.

"We chisled the mortar out of it and put it back up," he says. "We didn't want to waste anything."

Workers started building on Sept. 9, 2011, and completed the job on June 2, 2012, in a nine-month whirlwind. "From soup to nuts, done," he says. "It shouldn't take years to build a custom home. If you have your plans and materials in place, the work moves quickly."



Details and Design

The result is an elegant, two-story stone house, trimmed with antique brick and timber beams. A cedar shake roof is punctuated by a series of smaller rooflines. An arched eyebrow roof over the front door is a tribute to craftsmanship, pieced together from mahogany planks banded with copper.

The house is large, 5,600 square feet, not counting the finished lower level. Ceiling heights are 10 feet on the first floor and nine feet on the second floor. Scott drew the plans, then took his ideas to architect Richard Buchanan of Archer & Buchanan in West Chester.

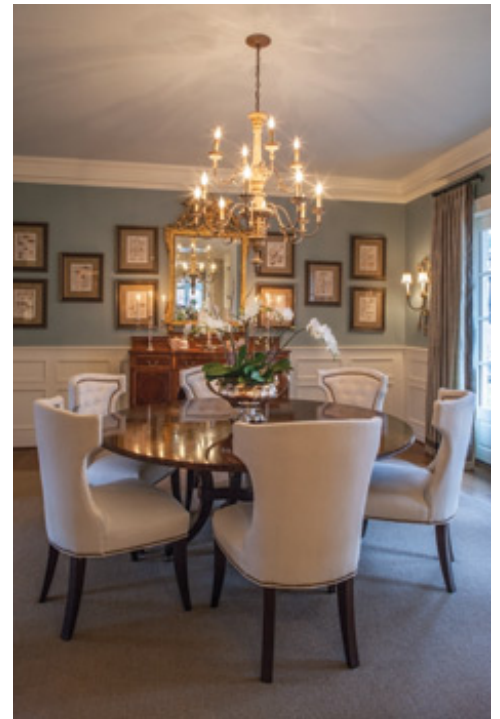
Even with room to spare, he was intent on achieving a layout in which each square foot is put to its highest and best use. Witness the foyer, which provides a grand entrance, as well as space for entertaining. Passageways on either side are outfitted for storage. Cupboards for china and glassware serve both the foyer and the adjacent dining room. On the opposite side, between the foyer and the family room, there is built-in, climate-controlled wine storage.

In every space, Scott sweated the details. He chose white oak, quarter sawn in planks 11 inches wide, for the flooring. He turned to Michael Saienni of Newark to build a staircase with a gracefully arched gooseneck bannister—"very tricky to make but I had to have it," he says. The size and scope of the dining room was dictated by a round, flame mahogany table that seats 10 guests.

For casual meals, the family gathers around a rustic wood table in the sun room. The rattan settee and chairs were made in the 1950s and are outfitted with such retro features as drink holders and cubbies for magazines. The vintage pieces and an antique marble-top French butcher's table were gifts from Betsy Porter, Scott's mom.

"She has great taste and is a wonderful decorator," he says.

The Italian limestone tiles on the floor are antiqued and pillowed, a technique in which the pavers are slightly raised in the center, rather than flat. A water heating system ensures the tiles are warm and toasty underfoot.



Family Friendly

Scott's plan called for other niceties and conveniences that make life pleasant for a family with two small children and two large dogs. A home theater is furnished with an oversized sectional sofa that can accommodate a crowd on race day. An open pet shower in the mudroom makes it easy to hose down the pooches after a romp outdoors. Woodburning fireplaces are equipped with gas lines that make lighting a blaze a simple task.

"Hit the button. The gas ignites the wood and you have a fire going," Scott says.

In decorating the house, he and his wife, Inci, took a fresh, hip approach to tradition, mixing such elements as formal, five-piece crown moldings and tufted leather seating with contemporary grasscloth wall coverings. The effect is relaxed and welcoming.

"Inci and I have very similar tastes," he says. "We love to drive around and look at houses."

Her favorite spot is the kitchen. A massive island combines natural walnut cabinetry topped with creamy Calcutta gold marble. Zinc-and-glass lanterns provide task lighting. Upper and lower cupboards are painted white and accented with solid brass handles and drawer pulls.

Upholstered counter stools at the island are accented in nailhead trim. That classic motif is repeated in the adjacent family room, where a pair of tailored sofas flank the fireplace.



The Porters loved the look of an Italian fireplace mantel carved from limestone, but not its \$35,000 price tag. So, they emailed an image of the mantel to a fabricator in the United States, who crafted a piece from Indiana limestone for a fraction of the price.

A Country House

On the second floor, hip roofs are reflected in clipped, angular ceiling lines that evoke the feeling of a centuries-old country house. “Those rooflines make it feel more cottagy,” he says.

The Porter twins, Jack and Ainsley, share a nursery for now. Their father built a wing of bedrooms and baths that brother and sister will move into, designed to take them from toddlers to teens.

All the second-floor baths are done in a timeless palette, with Calcutta marble floors, countertops and shower surrounds, gray walls and polished nickel fixtures and lighting sconces.

“It’s a combination you never get tired of looking at,” Scott says.

Yet each space is unique, displaying a variation on the theme. In one bath, floors are finished in square matte tiles, while the next is paved in small, hexagonal tiles. Sconces range from trim torches with crisp white shades to exuberant sunbursts mounted directly on the mirror over the sink. Walls are in varying shades, from pewter to charcoal.

In the master bath, polished mosaic marble is set in a rectangle on the floor, surrounded with large tiles of honed stone to create the effect of a sparkling carpet.

Throughout the house, there are one-of-a-kind touches. Scott found the weathered wood he integrated into a powder room vanity when he was working on a barn for his father. The antique, leaded glass doors on the bar came from his parents’ summer home in Maine. The posts and beam that define an archway in the lower-level gathering space came from the set of “The Village,” the 2004 thriller by M. Night Shyamalan filmed in Chadds Ford.

“It’s fun and interesting to take things from different times and places and come up with ways to bring them together,” he says. “That is what gives a house a sense of history.”