

# living HISTORY

Two globe-trotters found their next adventure in the renovation of a 150-year-old farmhouse. Yes, they hung shiplap. But they also hung vibrant contemporary art and made room for passed-down family treasures. The look feels familiar and somehow new. Let's call it modern heirloom style.



BY PAIGE PORTER FISCHER

PHOTOS DAVID LAND

STYLING YVETTE GONZALES



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The best advice I ever got was to go have a grand adventure before having kids,” says designer Alys Protzman, who studied and worked for years in New York City before she and her husband, Alex, went off the grid on a trip around the world. They traveled light but carried home loads of inspiration from other cultures and a newfound desire to “put down roots and own some land.”

That led to the couple’s next adventure: restoring a 150-year-old farmhouse in Bynum, NC, an old cotton-mill town that had the slow pace and space they craved. What’s more, the home came with beautiful old bones and period details, like the impeccable millwork and original heart pine floors preserved beneath vinyl tiles. “The architecture was compelling enough to overlook all the negatives: the lack of air-conditioning, old

In the kitchen, *above*, Alys opted for cream-color Alabama marble counters. The honed finish forgives etching and scratching better than a polished variety. Over the dining nook, she added whimsy to a schoolhouse clock by flanking it with cutlery formed from crafts store wire. “Best \$7 and 30 minutes I ever spent,” Alys says.

*Right*, Alys with her husband, Alex; kids, Poppy, 5, and Baldwin, 4; and pup, Stokley. The couple recently welcomed daughter Darby to the family.





WALL  
LEHIGH GREEN  
HC-131  
BENJAMIN  
MOORE

Alys fell for this green, which reminded her of old chalkboards, at a New York hotel and matched it for the dining room. The formal furniture was inherited from her grandparents, but a vintage hemp tabletop blanket relaxes it.



## RENOVATION RECAP

Alys and Alex Protzman bumped out the back of their house by 15 feet, opening up the living area and eat-in kitchen while gaining a mudroom downstairs and a master suite upstairs. Here's what they learned once the dust settled. ■ **WOULDA, COULDA, SHOULDA** "I think my mudroom could have been twice the size. I'm not a complete hoarder, but there is a design saying that you can never have too much storage." ■ **SIMPLE PLEASURES** "I'm surprised by how much I enjoy the original, practically untouched spaces. I love their antique quality contrasted with the more contemporary feeling in the added-on spaces." ■ **PROJECT MANTRA** "Expect the best. Be prepared for the worst. And bring chocolate chip cookies to the crew at least once a week."



radiant heaters, peeling laminate countertops,” Alys says. “The house needed a lot of work, but thankfully we are project people. So we took it one project at a time.”

An addition on the back of the house won them enough extra living space to reinvent this as their forever home. “I knew I didn’t want to design a modern farmhouse in the way everybody expects, with rusty tin signs and chicken wire everywhere,” Alys says. “We are too eclectic to fit into that specific mold. We love color and pattern and modern art too much. As a designer, I delight in all the quirky, unexpected moments in a space.” Case in point: She’s layered organic live-edge wood pieces with industrial elements, covered thrift shop chairs with hand-woven textiles, and filled an antique hutch with contemporary ceramics and her kids’ art-class pottery. Alys’ look is comfortable and casual, but defined by its contrasts.

“Traveling really opened my eyes to think and decorate outside the box,” Alys says. “What’s unexpected is often what we remember most about a place, and that goes for a home, too.”



“[For the pantry, above], I found an antique nickel sink, had it shipped here, had a countertop made to reveal its beautiful shape...and it doesn’t drain very well. Live and learn!”

Wall-mounted shelves from an antiques fair, *far left*, create a front door drop zone for shoes and whatnots.

During renovations, they uncovered old horse-and-hound wallpaper on the stair landing, *left*. Alys taped off a square of it, and Alex built a frame for this little patch of history.



## “I LOVE DEMO.

I came out to the site with my 3-day-old baby in my arms, and it looked like a dollhouse—the entire back had been ripped off. It was awesome.”

ALYS PROTZMAN, HOMEOWNER AND DESIGNER

The mudroom was an addition, but Alys made it feel original with brick floors. “We salvaged the bricks from walkways around the house,” Alys says. “No one but me would ever know the history, but I get into the details like that.”





A local craftsman fashioned a live-edge headboard in the master bedroom. "I love the little details of the butterfly joints and the contrast of the organic warm wood against the clean, graphic shiplap," Alys says.

“A FUNKY CHAIR with an antique table—that’s my language. A modern lamp on your grandmother’s sideboard—that’s my version of fabulous.” ALYS PROTZMAN





Alys gave the added-on master the patina of age with plenty of shiplap paneling and hand-hewn beams salvaged from a shed they had to raze. A free-standing Scandinavian fireplace puts off great heat with a flip of a switch, Alys says. "We really wanted a fireplace, but I wasn't about to haul logs upstairs." ■

Wraparound white linen blackout curtains create a cocoon for the room, which feels like a tree house because of the windows on three sides.

