

DRAFTING BOARD

Pure Folly

An underused outbuilding goes from
junk to a playful woodland retreat

BY ANNE HILTON BRADY PHOTOS BY TERRY J. GIBSON

the dining room, which has an open fireplace, became a conversation nook. The new woodwork, including a custom-made mantel, is a nod to the property's history.

Right, from top: Salvaged timbers were sourced and built a fireplace mantel. The space opens up from around the world—woodpecker into the new "hunting lodge." Opposite, James Robert Goodwin transformed an old cabin on a Pennsylvania property into a rustic folly.

As an architectural term, the word "folly" means a whimsical structure built to serve as a conversation piece or to lend interest to a view. Follies were employed principally for ornamentation and were often eccentric in design and construction: think Gothic towers, miniature fortresses, and Chinese temples. Found on the grounds of large-country estates, they were particularly popular in England and France during the eighteenth century.

While follies and their sprawling parent estates are now largely part of history, the concept of an idyllic retreat on one's own property is not a foreign one. But a greenhouse does not count, nor does a pool house or barn—a true folly does not promise dedicated work or living space; its design simply indulges in the beauty of a particular locale.

Following in the footsteps of the European gentry, they've seen on their extensive travels, a Pennsylvania couple created their very own conversation piece on the grounds of their three-acre property in Bucks County, Pa. Actually, her husband dubbed the project "Millena's folly," laughs Millena Coffey, as it was her vision to re-create a folly in the style of a French hunting lodge from the bones of an unadorned pool cabana.

"When we lived in Berlin, we spent a lot of time in France, and I was drawn to the look of those old lodges," she admits. "And the property's stone walls and the cabana's existing fireplace tied it all in."

Originally built in the '80s or '90s, the pool house was long and narrow and built around an outdoor bar; however, the Coffeys used it principally for storage. When the time was right, the couple called on Robert Goodwin, principal of the architecture/interior design firm R. Goodwin Ltd., to manage the transformation. They had already worked with Goodwin on their main house, a 200-year-old stone farmhouse that's similar to "an old French chateau," says Millena. "It has a very European look."

Goodwin used about two-thirds of the cabana's original shell, and reconfigured and rebuilt the remaining third. He widened the structure overall by 17', allowing for a balanced roofline. "Like a Saltsbo, the original roof was done on one side and hung on the other. The extra width allowed for equal pitch on either side of the ridge," he says.

Arranged in what Goodwin calls "a lay U," the folly now stretches from a dining room with an original stone



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Replace it a central dining area to an informal space for serving buffets or arranging flowers. French doors on either end open out onto a stone terrace, which doubles as extended living and entertaining space in the warmer months.

In keeping with the look of a rustic hunting lodge, the ceiling is open, with exposed rafters and beams. "All of the woodwork elements—the ceiling rafters, posts and linets, and door casings—were planed to take the edges off and make them seem old," says Goodwin. "A whitewash painting effect completed the look so that it all appears faded, as though in need of more paint." Similarly, the plaster was "aged" using a ragged brush.

The Coffys decided to keep the cabin's utilitarian brick floor, but additional materials were needed to accommodate the renovation. They sourced old Pennsylvania bricks, and the entire floor was re-laid with existing and



reclaimed bricks mixed together in a herringbone pattern. "The herringbone separates itself in such a way that it's not clear where one wing begins and another ends," says the architect. "It makes the three barroom spaces uniform."

For Goodwin, turning a cubana into a hunting lodge was one challenge; incorporating the Coffey's collections was another. "It's a little bit both of us," says Millens. "We've lived in Europe and the Middle East, and our finds are often related to our travels. We love early lighting and also eighteenth-century furniture, and I love our tables because we entertain a lot. Overall we don't try to fill a particular space—we buy things we like and then find places for them."

"There were specific furniture items in the plan from the get-go," adds Goodwin of the early design stages. "My goal was to create a fitting background for the pieces while keeping the fully practical and avoiding a museum-like space."

Organized around a naturalistic theme, Millens displayed fresh strips from pressed ferns ("some are Swedish,

some American," she says) to a French minimalist's bearably collected-in-a-pair-of-entire-plexiglass-cases-in-glass. Her husband's hunting inspired the deer collection, and an impressive tricorn hat, brought to the U.S. by a French dealer, hangs above the fireplace.

The pen hunt for tables is apparent in the dining room's antique American fern table and the nearby eighteenth-century French monastery table. A foursome of American planters—Millens originally bought two, pillars and had them cut in half—cleverly delineates the dining space. "My hope the original paint—or the lack thereof—to match the old-looking hand-hewn beams," she says.

Now that it's complete, the Coffeys use the lodge frequently for entertaining, while Millens visits almost every day. For her, the folly is no less than a relaxing personal retreat. "It really has no purpose other than to get away and have space," she says. —*EM*

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