



A NEW CLASSIC

With the help of architect Michael O’Kelley, Lauren and Chuck Welden tweak the traditional Southern dogtrot for modern-day living at their farm in Coosa County.

ON A NONDESCRIPT BLACKTOP OFF OF HIGHWAY 280 IN COOSA COUNTY, a slice of country living at its best awaits those fortunate enough to be invited. The engaging atmosphere starts on the approach to Lauren and Chuck Welden’s hunting camp and farm; on the right is a shimmering pond beckoning for a fishing line and on the left are the striking ruins of an old mill. With car windows down, visitors can hear the blissful greeting of the rushing creek that runs next to the house.

The historic property, purchased by the Weldens in the 1990s, was once the site of a Coosa County gold rush and contains the remains of the Bradford Factory textile mill. “I grew up hearing stories from my grandfather about Coosa County where he was raised—about outlaws, fishing, and how hard it was to grow cotton,” says Chuck. “It was a natural place to look.”

The Weldens started by setting up camp in a renovated older house which once served as the

The home’s materials are simple but bring character—a fieldstone base, board and batten siding, and a crimped metal roof—“nothing too shiny or sleek,” says Michael. Photo: Woody O’Neal

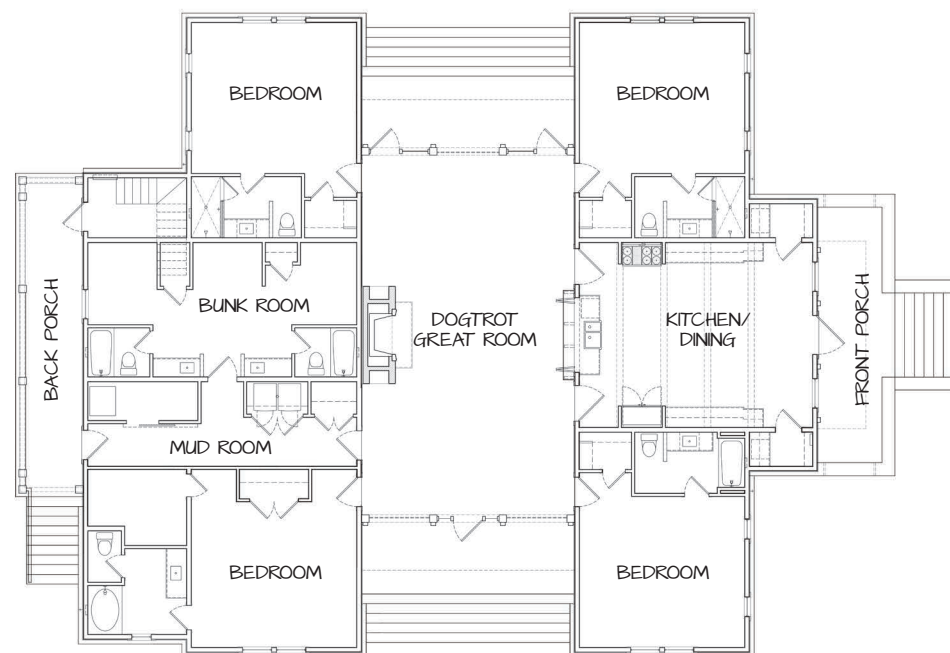


“We used *classic farmhouse materials* because we wanted the new house to feel like it had been there a long time.”
 – Architect Michael O’Kelley



The Classic Dogtrot: Why It (Still) Works

Originating in the 1800s, the Southern dogtrot home is distinguished by a large, open breezeway that runs through the middle of the house with two separate areas on either side, all under one roof. “The design was born out of climate conditions before electricity or air conditioning—the central open-air plan allowed cross breezes to come through the house,” says architect Michael O’Kelley. “The design still resonates today, especially for a hunting camp or second home. We updated the dogtrot to make it more of a four-season house by adding the screens and vinyl panels on either end of the space.”



office for Bradford Mill. They then added a log cabin from the 1850s and a smokehouse, which both were moved to the property and reassembled. Once they knew all four of their adult children had decided to stay close by in Birmingham—and with grandchildren in the mix—the Weldens decided it was time to build a new farmhouse on the site of the old caretaker’s place, which was beyond repair. Chuck, a partner in WeldenField Development, LLC, was hands-on in the design process, working with architect Michael O’Kelley and homebuilder Will Maxey.

Before starting the project, the couple did their research by visiting noteworthy hunting camps and lodges around the state to gather ideas. They landed on the idea of an updated version of the historic Southern dogtrot. “My favorite thing about this style is that it encourages everyone to come together in the dogtrot space,” says Chuck. “The bedrooms are smaller, and we

ABOVE: The dogtrot area of the house has options from being totally open on the ends with screens or closing a second layer of vinyl panels for added temperature control. The casual furnishings evoke a relaxed mood, while hunting trophies collected by Chuck and his sons serve as the art for the home. A Bible verse carved in limestone above the mantel is the family’s theme verse. TOP RIGHT: Lauren and Chuck Welden RIGHT: Builder Will Maxey of WeldenField Construction (standing) and architect Michael O’Kelley.





CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: A metal sign lets you know you've arrived. Four bedrooms and a bunk room welcome friends and family for weekend visits. Cast-iron skillettles nailed to trees across the property are used for target practice. A chapel overlooking the creek was built by friends to celebrate the generosity of the Weldens who have a tradition of offering the property to church groups or others in need of some respite. OPPOSITE: Rustic but beautiful knotty alder-paneled doors add authenticity, along with shiplap walls and handcrafted concrete pavers for the flooring (from Peacock Pavers).





"The kitchen is my favorite place, and I love that in this house, you enter right into it," says Lauren. "It means a lot to me to have a large table for everyone to gather around." Bi-fold windows open to a bar in the living space.

don't have television or internet, so it fosters social interaction in the main room." A game table in the corner makes for fun family times, and comfortable furnishings encourage relaxation. "I wanted the house to be no fuss—easy setup and breakdown," says Lauren. "Walk in the kitchen, put away the groceries, and start enjoying!"

That enjoyment definitely begins in the kitchen as guests are greeted with concession stand-like bins holding all manner of snacks, both sweet and savory. Open shelves are loaded with fine whiskeys on one side and clear spirits on the

other. "People are constantly bringing wine, bourbon, their favorite jams, and so forth, so we are always ready to entertain," says Chuck. The house is also stocked with extra slippers, all manner of games and puzzles, fishing tackle, and plenty of hunting gear. But don't leave anything behind. "I don't return items. If you want it, come back and get it!" laughs Chuck.

On the grounds around the house, a large firepit awaits gatherings on cold evenings while a vegetable garden thrives in the side yard—the finishing touches to this idyllic setting that beckons relaxation, recreation, and rejuvenation.



The ruins of Bradford Factory date from the 1840s and are located along the path of the now-defunct Central Plank Road which ran from Montgomery to Wintersboro and Socapatoy Creek. OPPOSITE, LEFT TO RIGHT: An Alabama barn was relocated to the property and repurposed for smoking barbeque, live music, and all-around entertainment. The old dam once generated power for the Bradford Factory mill.



“When everyone else was buying lake and beach property, *we were buying timberland* because we thought it provided a combination of recreation, family time, and opportunities for our children to learn how to work. We didn’t want to just entertain our kids.” – Chuck Welden



RESOURCES: Architect: Michael O’Kelley, okelleyarchitecture.com Builder: Will Maxey of WeldenField Construction, weldenfield.com Interior designer: Nan Jackson, interiorsetcbynan.com Select furnishings: Seibels, seibelscottage.com Landscape including fire pit, parking pad, boot washing station: Gary Mitchell of Agricultural Services, trustAGservices.com Screens: Jonathan Wilson, Wilson Screening Solutions wilsonscreeningsolutions.com