

/ by Allison Walsh / photography by Inspiro 8 Studios

Heart & Soul

Modern farmhouse project captured the imagination of all involved



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Blair Vana always imagined herself living off the fat of the land on a large piece of property.

"I had a romantic notion of chickens and goats," she says. And, while she allows farm life up close can at times be more barbaric than idyllic (mostly because of roosters), Vana is enthralled by the rural setting she, her husband, Matt and their three teenaged children now call home.

"I just love the space, how quiet it is out here," she says. "I love sitting on the porch and hearing nothing."

Whichever porch it is, the wide wrap-around front porch or the breezy screened porch out back, quiet is in great supply around this modern farmhouse perched on 150 acres deep in a pine forest in Fountain Inn.

The love for this property became infectious for nearly everyone involved. Amanda Thomas, the architect who represented Tindall Architecture Workshop on the home's design, counts this project high on her list of favorites. "I'll always remember going out there for the first time in the winter of 2015. We hopped on their Kawasaki and Matt drove us all over the property, and it was just magical."

A creek runs along much of the perimeter of the property, as do a number of woodland trails perfect for ATV adventuring. A gun range built in a clearing by Matt and his father and a massive fire pit have seen regular use since well before the house was built, but the house--a gleaming white board and batten beauty-- is where the real magic happens.

Thomas's design, masterfully executed by CarsonSpeer Builders, seamlessly blends the charm of a traditional Southern farmhouse with elements of modern high style and today's most efficient construction practices. "They will have plenty of work to do on the land - and that's what they wanted - but there will be very little maintenance needed on the house," says James Speer, who took the lead on the build.

Where a traditional farmhouse would be all wood, CarsonSpeer was able to achieve the same effect with far more durable materials. Real wood was used in a few places, like the cedar rafter tails, but most everything else is either Hardie board or PVC. The metal roof lends design consistency, tying together the main house and garage, and the hidden fastener system makes it less prone to leakage.

"There's a comfort level created by how we can build such a tight house today," says Speer, noting the home's many energy efficient features, including abundant spray foam insulation and airtight windows and doors. "If we didn't put fresh air in with the HVAC system the fireplace wouldn't work. No air gets in that house."

That is, of course, unless fresh air is on the agenda, in which case the porches rise to the occasion. The biggest porch



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[left] A large, two-story vaulted living space that opens to the screened porch provides family space inside and out, and lends a traditional farmhouse feel to this contemporary floor plan. A multitude of generously proportioned windows - a priority for Blair - flood the home with natural light throughout much of the day.

The wide eave covering the front porch makes this a comfortable perch no matter the weather, and allows for opening up the house to capture the cross breeze provided by summer storms.

runs along the front, wraps around the side and connects the house to the garage, providing shelter from the moment one ascends the steps, an element Thomas says is integral to achieving the traditional farmhouse aesthetic.

But, there's much more at play here than a serene spot for sipping sweet tea. "It's a nice, relaxing porch, but it's also functional," Thomas says. "The overhang is deep enough to open the sliding doors and windows when it's raining and get a nice cross breeze through to the back porch, which is also protected from rain and mosquitoes."

The proximity of the back porch to the kitchen and to the backyard grilling station sets the home up perfectly for entertaining, as does the non-traditional open floor plan inside. Speer says an older farmhouse would have been more chopped up and that this home's airy interior won the hearts of every subcontractor, supplier and potential client that visited the site during the build. Matching today's preference for an open floor plan with the traditional farmhouse concept was a challenge to which Thomas rose beautifully. "I looked at how we could have that without just walking into a big open space," she says.

Her solution was a navy and gold, shiplap-wrapped jewel box of a butler's pantry, situated at the heart of the main living area. "I worked really hard to make the butler's pantry this cool box floating in the middle of the house, rather than tucked to the side, out of the way," Thomas says. "I arranged it to sort of divide the space but still allow things to flow nicely around the living room, dining room and kitchen."





Clean white walls and more large windows keep things bright and cheery on the utilitarian end of the home. The laundry room, conveniently situated just inside the back door, includes a dog wash for cleaning muddy paws and feet.

[left top] Matt teamed up with his dad to build the chicken coop, adding board and batten to the exterior to coordinate with the main house.

[left bottom] The navy and gold palette from the kitchen is repeated in the butler's pantry, a shiplap-wrapped jewel that sits at the heart of the main living area.

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The same navy palette with gold accents is repeated in the kitchen, where open shelving and a massive island give Vana the space she needs to get creative with her cuisine. The quartz countertop is a lower maintenance and budget-friendly alternative to her original desire for marble, which ultimately was used only in the master bath.

The kitchen is Vana's favorite room in the house, and her favorite feature is the window over the sink that gives her a mother hen's eye view of the chicken coop (also built by the Vana men and designed to mimic the main house) across the back yard. "I love standing at the sink," she says. "I almost feel like it's better than TV screens with the chickens and ducks out there."

At present the Vana brood includes 12 adult chickens, two ducks, and 13 baby chicks. "I went to Duncan to get 4 laying hens and came back with 13." From the kitchen window she can also keep an eye on her garden, which is thankfully a large one, as she admits to showing the same lack of restraint with seed catalogs as she does with chicken shopping.

Windows were a priority for Vana and her wish was granted with a home that is naturally bright throughout the majority of the day. She says planning for natural light was a top priority and even admits to asking for a window in the pantry design, which was succinctly shot down. She did score windows in the well-lit laundry room, however,



which is located just inside the entrance from the garage and includes a dog wash for keeping their four pups from tracking in red clay.

Likewise, there's an impressive shower for their owners just down the hall. "Matt wanted the master shower to be like a car wash," Speer says. "We also added an outdoor shower that wasn't part of the original design." Because the home is sited 2,000 feet from the road, and far from any hope of city water, Speer says a hydrologist was hired to help his team find water on the property and today the property is serviced by four separate wells filled with thousands of gallons of water.

When asked about a favorite detail in the home, Vana's answer came as a bit of a surprise. The railing on the stairway that leads to the kids' bedrooms and sitting area was inspired by her grandmother's midcentury home. She had a vision for the railing that was reminiscent of a farm fence and turned to the internet for inspiration photos. Speer and the team from Heirloom Stair and Iron created just what she hoped for with fresh white horizontal boards. Simple design that works is a recurring theme in this stunning home, and one the Vanas hope will be appreciated and enjoyed by generations to come. **PH**



[clockwise from top] Blair originally wanted marble countertops throughout the home but ultimately decided on lower maintenance quartz everywhere except the sumptuous master bath. The master bath is also home to a massive shower that builder James Speer likens to a car wash, per Matt's request.

Enjoying some porch time along with their furry friends are Luke, Matthew, Charlotte, Matt and Blair. Luke, the eldest of the Vana brood, flew the coop for Clemson University this fall.

The stair railing, reminiscent of a farm fence, was inspired by a similar one in Blair's grandmother's home and designed by Heirloom Stair and Iron.