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The Charm of a Modern Farmhouse

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVID BURROUGHS



The classic historic farmhouse, exclusive to the countryside and exuding rustic charm, has inspired a new style surging in popularity—the “modern farmhouse.” The modern farmhouse concept establishes an aesthetic reminiscent of an old farmhouse but updated with contemporary and sophisticated elements. The style relies on carefully incorporating rustic and salvaged materials with modern touches to create a chic and

comfortable space. This design aesthetic, which nods to the past while also feeling very current, has become increasingly popular due to its comfortable style, clean lines, and accessibility while referencing the classic “gable” of the traditional farmhouse. In this article, I explore and explain the materials and design elements necessary to create a stunning modern farmhouse, whether in the design of a new home or the renovation of an existing home.

Incorporate Reclaimed Beams

Adding reclaimed beams to a ceiling helps tremendously to incorporate the rustic feel of an old farmhouse. I'm currently in the process of building my final personal home just outside of Charlottesville in Afton. I incorporated eight long hand-hewn oak beams and a 35-foot-long ridge beam into my great room to evoke "oldness" in the new vaulted drywall space.

When working with exposed beams as a design element, the style of beam used is entirely dependent upon the desired outcome. For a more modern/contemporary look, one could utilize a refined box beam created by a trim carpenter with a clean, mitered edge. A farmhouse-style home typically uses beams with a hand-hewn look, which means it has a lot of chop marks. Two ways to achieve this texture are to make chops with an axe or buy truly hand-hewn old salvaged beams. These methods result in two distinct looks because you can never get a "new" hand-

hewn beam to look like a salvaged beam. Salvaged beams have distinct aging and coloring that appear when the wood ages, making it truly unique and non-replicable.

For a more industrial look, try adding visible bolts to the beams. An industrial feel can also be created by including metal strapping or fasteners. Typically, fasteners are concealed and plugged with a wooden peg. When utilizing solid beams, which can be extremely heavy, the beams should be hollowed out on the backside to remove weight and allow for blocking on the ceiling so fasteners can attach by way of the side. Depending on how the beams are made, it is crucial to have their weight assessed against the existing roof or ceiling frame capacity to hold that weight.

Contrasting Windows & Doors

Dark window sashes and doors are quintessential to the modern farmhouse aesthetic. By painting windows and doors a dark bronze, slate, or black, one can create a contrast against the lightness of

the current modern farmhouse exterior and interior trend. Dark sashes were never historically used in farmhouses; however, incorporating this contrasting color supports the modern and fresh feeling throughout the exterior and interior of the home.

Select the Right Flooring

Flooring in a modern farmhouse is usually a fumed white oak or another character-grade flooring such as reclaimed, rough sawn barn wood flooring. Character grade hardwood contains some naturally occurring knots and checks within the graining of the wood, creating a more rustic feel. If you are not planning to lay new flooring in your home, try stripping the existing floor to create a lighter color and then seek a stain that turns it into a gray/brown hue rather than a red-based hue. A dark floor shows everything, especially with a lot of glass and natural light in the space, although this is very much a personal decision.



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When it comes to interior architecture in a modern farmhouse, there is a careful balance that must be achieved in order to keep the architecture reminiscent of old farmhouses while incorporating the look with modern furniture, lighting, and accessories.



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Simple and Clean Interior Design

The interior architecture of a modern farmhouse is quite different from that of an authentic historic farmhouse. Rather than the ornate interior details sometimes seen in historic farmhouses, the interior architecture of a modern farmhouse is modernized by the simplicity of the cabinetry design, millwork features, and the cleanliness or lack of trim. In addition, paint colors are typically in a neutral palette of soft whites, greys, slate blues, or light earthy greens, reinforcing the unfussy and straightforward vernacular.

Layer Textural Elements

While the furniture in a modern farmhouse can be either antique or modern, ideally, it is a blend of both. Furnishings and accessories should be comfortable and practical—you want the home to feel cozy without feeling cluttered. In addition, since the aesthetic is primarily comprised of neutral colors,

you'll want to incorporate a mix of textures to keep the space from feeling flat. Combine natural materials such as wood, stone, rattan, sisal, and organic fabrics to create an environment that feels connected to the outdoors. By layering a combination of neutral tones, textured materials, and natural elements, the interior of a modern farmhouse can feel beautifully minimal while also extraordinarily comfortable.

In closing, the modern farmhouse is undoubtedly one of the strongest design trends at this time, and no one has a crystal ball to predict how long the trend will last. As a design professional, I expect it will have a long life due to the fact that it focuses on simplicity, lack of clutter, and the combination of old and new. Should the trend ever change over the generations, the modern farmhouse shape is such a pure geometric house form that it easily lends itself to future transformation by applying different materials and colors.

Born and raised in Virginia, **Cathy Purple Cherry** ultimately landed in Annapolis where she grew a large architectural firm specializing in high-end custom homes and estates. Today, the firm has four offices—Charlottesville, VA, Middleburg, VA, White Sulphur Springs, WV, and Annapolis, MD—and specializes in creating luxurious residences across the United States. A talented architect, visionary, and three-dimensional thinker, Cathy is able to marry clients' dreams with the reality of the built environment. While she revels in the intricate design opportunities presented by high-end residential architecture, Cathy is equally passionate about her philanthropic efforts. She and her firm offer their design knowledge and sensitivity to the special needs community via the Purple Cherry Purposeful Architecture Studio. A true creative servant, Cathy Purple Cherry is unfailing in her efforts to positively impact all those around her.

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