

# perfect vintage

*A renovation finds  
new beauty in  
an old California  
farmhouse.*







A giant of an old sycamore tree shades Don and Elizabeth Stevenson's renovated 1940s farmhouse. A new pool was sited down a few steps from the house, allowing mountain views to remain the focal point.



## Tear it down! Elizabeth Stevenson heard the advice.

She saw the rabbit warren of tiny rooms and the floor-to-ceiling knotty pine paneling. But she also saw the potential in the down-on-its-heels 1940s home, set in an Eden of fruit trees on a bucolic Sonoma County hilltop overlooking the Russian River.

“There’s something lovely about old farmhouses,” Elizabeth says. “I knew we could bring it back from neglect and make it a home for our family.”

She and husband Don turned to architect Jennifer Tulley, who removed walls to open up rooms, added expanses of windows and patio doors to take advantage of captivating views, and reimagined the home’s forest of knotty pine. “I loved being able to use old elements in new, modern ways,” Tulley says.

Some knotty pine boards were planed and painted white, retaining their place on the home’s walls. Others found new purpose on the underside of metal awnings that shade outdoor gathering areas. Redwood sheathing discovered under exterior siding and in a ramshackle garage was elevated to star status—it now clads the dining room ceiling, covers the vent hood and forms floating shelves in the kitchen, and awes as an accent wall in the master bedroom.

Tulley reinvented other original elements as well, slathering exposed ceiling beams with dark stain and covering the original brick fireplace with black paint that meshes with sleek new black-framed doors and windows.

Upstairs, she replaced a former deck with a serene master suite that offers a bird’s-eye glimpse of the historic Wohler Bridge. Down the hall, the Stevensons’ three kids dream of tomorrow’s fresh-air adventures in newly expanded comfy bedrooms.

“This really is our dream home,” Elizabeth says. “I love how it feels. It’s my happy place, where I can reconnect with nature and my family—and leave all the worries of the world behind.”

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Combining two rooms yielded a spacious dining room that welcomes gatherings of family and friends—and connects to the outdoors through a series of patio doors. A local craftsman constructed the table using reclaimed lumber. “Don hand-finished it to keep the texture of the original wood and make sure it has a certain patina,” Elizabeth says.



## farm made modern

lesson  
number

2

Wood floors and shelves are a no-brainer, but also look for opportunities to infuse the warmth of wood into other places: a ceiling, mantel, vanity, or even an accent wall.







*left:* Eliminating a former butler's pantry expanded the footprint of the kitchen. Soapstone countertops pay homage to the home's era and jibe with the black-and-white palette. *above:* Shelves made of reclaimed redwood nod to natural elements just outside the Sonoma County kitchen; their texture and color add pleasing punch to an expanse of subway tile. *below:* A new apron-front sink with a drainboard built into the adjacent countertop celebrates the home's farmhouse heritage.







*left:* Architect Jennifer Tulley. *right:* Interior designer Jennifer Macdonald of Jennifer Robin Interiors worked with Elizabeth to bring in appropriate furnishings, including a vintage table that plays host to friendly chess matches. “She found local antiques and unique items that really speak to my personality and to modern farmhouse style,” Elizabeth says. *below:* The living room ceiling wears knotty pine coated in fresh white paint, and a reclaimed beam serves as a mantel on the original fireplace, now painted au courant black. Floors—sanded and stained a light color—evoke the sandy soil outside an expanse of new windows. “I love sitting here and watching the fog roll in from the Russian River,” Elizabeth says. “It’s magical how the sun then sends it slowly back to the ocean.”





"I grew up in farm country—this house  
suits my sensibilities."

—homeowner *Elizabeth Stevenson*



The living room's console cabinet, made by a local artisan using old lumber, suits the home's character and color palette.





*above:* The plain white siding of a former exterior wall hid redwood sheathing that Tulley left exposed as a focal-point interior wall in the master bedroom addition. “We couldn’t have asked for a better surprise,” Elizabeth says. *below left:* A sliding barn-style door constructed of reclaimed Douglas fir saves space in a closet off the main-level powder room, where the warmth of wood also touches a new vanity. *below right:* The only interior addition to the 1940s home was the master bedroom, sited on a former upper-level deck. Nubby textures on bedding create an inviting tactile vibe in the sanctuary space. *opposite:* The master bath repeats the kitchen’s vintage-look subway tile and the home’s clean white palette with hits of natural wood.











## master of reinvention

Architect Jennifer Tulley shares her strategy for making an old farmhouse live for today.

**OPEN WIDE.** Knocking down interior walls can make an older home more hospitable to modern living. Revise the floor plan to combine tiny rooms, allow for connections between living and entertaining spaces, and give family members room to stretch out and unwind.

**USE THE POWER OF SITE.** Notice the best things about your property and connect your home to the surrounding landscape. Old houses often have small, unimaginative door and window configurations. Add or enlarge windows and doors to make the most of your home's views. Tulley put in a bank of large-scale windows to bring mountain vistas into the living room and installed a series of patio doors—more in character with the farmhouse than a minimalist glass wall system—in the dining room.

**KEEP THE CHARACTER.** Faced with “knotty pine on the walls, on the ceilings—everywhere,” Tulley could have sent the old wood to the landfill. But she recaptured its beauty and kept a hallmark of this structure by reusing the wood in unexpected places. “It’s about changes that make a home more beautiful and livable while being respectful of historical character,” the architect says.





Nothing modernizes a room like touches of black. Get in touch with your dark side: window and door frames, countertops, painted beams and brick, and finishes on light fixtures and furniture.



*opposite:* Reclaimed wood sheathes Elizabeth's hardworking laundry area.  
*this photo:* Knotty pine removed from the home's interior brings warmth overhead to a patio where woven seating pieces overlook the pool and the property's bountiful trees.