

# Old McDonald House Gets Elegant Update

“Simple elegance” was the byword Shirley McDonald used when she updated her family’s ranch-style home in Huntsville, Ala. She and her husband, Albert, built the home in 1959 on farmland that Albert’s father had homesteaded in 1941.

As Alabama’s Secretary of Agriculture, Albert has spent the past eight years shuttling back and forth from the state capital in Montgomery to his home in Huntsville. If his campaign for U.S. Congressional 5th District Representative is successful, the shuttle route will become Washington, D.C., and Huntsville.

For the McDonalds, however, “home” will always be the family farm, where this year they grew 1,900 acres of cotton.

Albert and Shirley had only recently married when they first moved

to the farm and built their ranch-style home. Thirty years, four children, and one grandchild later, the house no longer came close to meeting their family’s needs.

“But when you live on a farm, you don’t sell your property because you need a new house,” Shirley says. “You re-do your house to meet your needs.”

Shirley’s tastes had changed quite a bit since her newlywed days. Her travels in Europe (the first time was in 1971 on a *Progressive Farmer*-sponsored tour) helped her appreciate classical architecture.

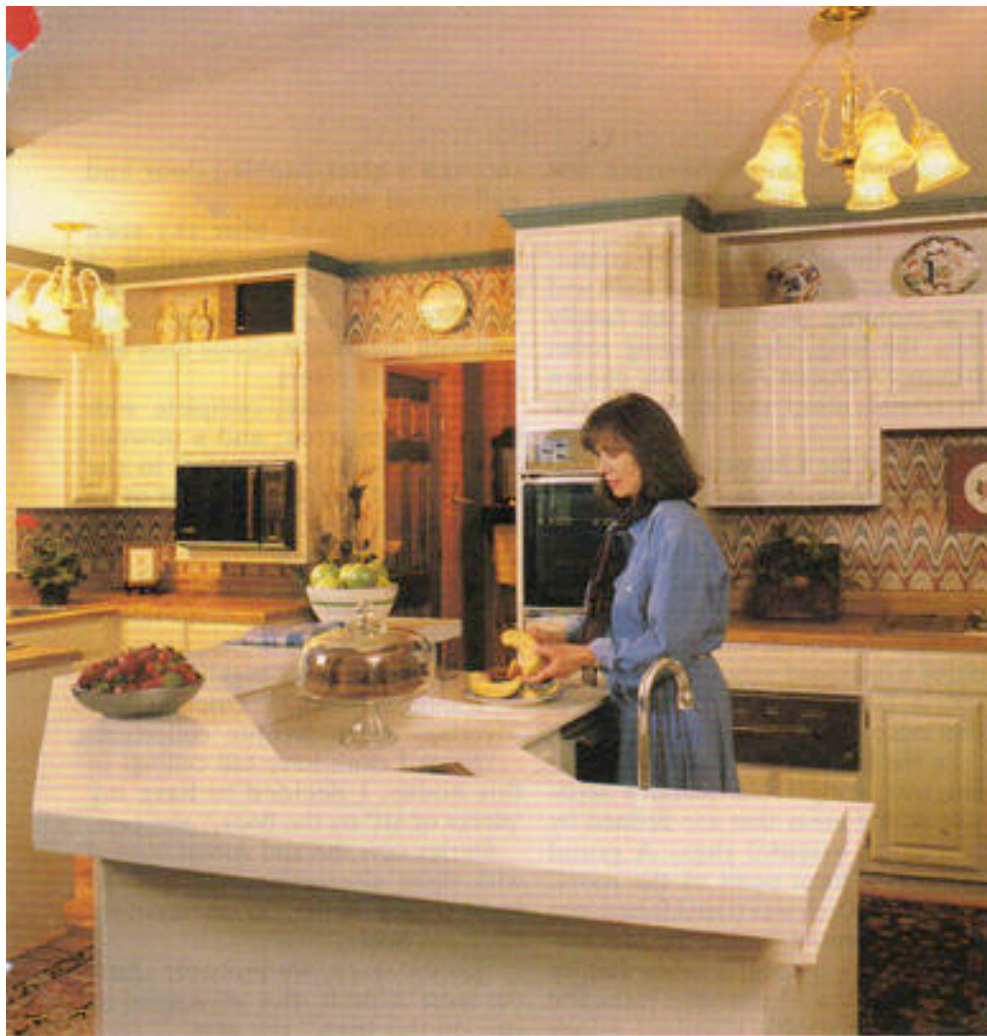
The antebellum homes in her husband’s adopted city of Montgomery also influenced Shirley. She shifted the style of the interior of her home from American Country to classic French and English.

There remained a stylistic clash, however, between the exterior and interior of the house. So the McDonalds consulted Huntsville architect Joe Milberger, AIA. He confirmed that a change in the roofline to a higher, more classical pitch was possible. He helped them avoid an “added on” look and made sure their ideas were structurally feasible.

“The easiest and least expensive way to support a new roof is to build over an existing roof,” Milberger explains, although this option isn’t always possible. Because a ranch-style house has a small attic space and heat builds up quickly there, ventilation holes must be included.

The McDonalds’ classic roof should last longer than their ranch-style roof, Milberger says, because the higher pitch allows rain to run off





A selection of homepages was created. Every original picture will have been used as a reference with a graphic look.

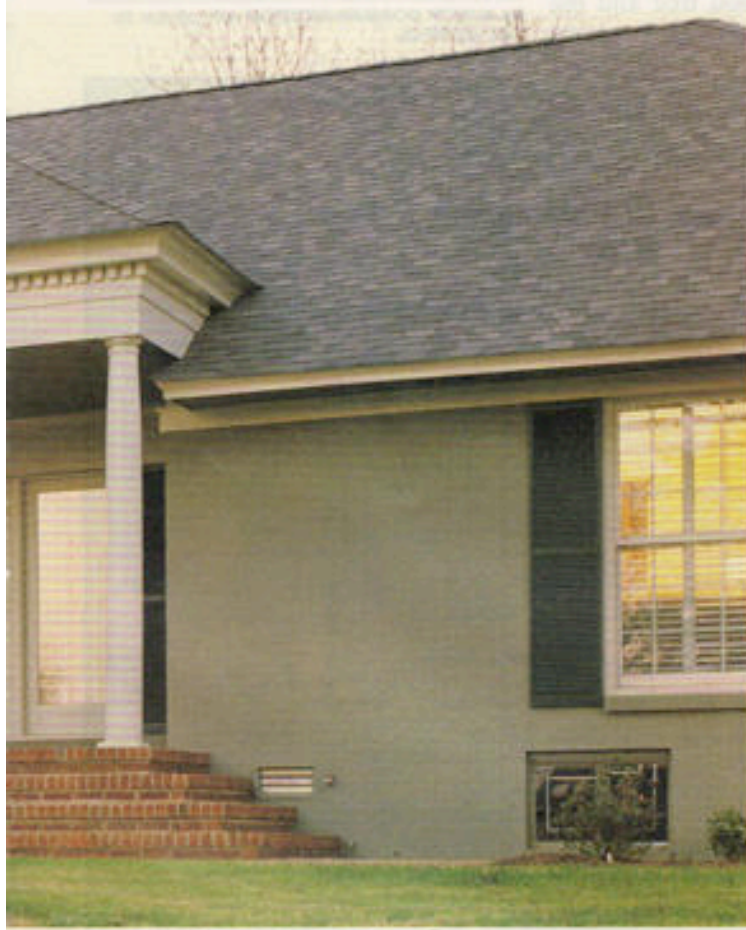
*Flamestitch rose and teal-blue wallpaper in the kitchen sets the color scheme throughout the house. Oriental rugs grace even the kitchen floor.*

more readily. "Plus, the new roofline gives more mass and an added richness to the house," the architect says.

In addition to the new roof, tiered steps and a long front porch added visual impact to the remodeled exterior. Windows across the front of the house were lengthened to play up the new classical lines of the roof. Cream-colored plantation shutters unified the front windows and emphasized the simple, yet elegant, style.

Throughout the house, Shirley's "less is more" motto can be seen in the minimal treatment given to windows. Shutters only or bare windows give ready access to fresh country scenery surrounding the house.

Originally, the house had the combination kitchen and den that is typical of 1950's ranch homes. The



*(Above) When Albert and Shirley McDonald were newly married, this typical ranch-style house met their needs. With renovations and additions, it still does 30 years later.  
(Left) The McDonalds gave their ranch-style house a more classic look by raising the roofline, lengthening the windows, and adding broad steps.*

kitchen was expanded by removing a wall from the existing laundry room and adding a new laundry at the back of the house.

Country cabinet doors were replaced with doors more in keeping with the classic style. The dark kitchen cabinets, appropriate for the previous country decor, were painted a cream color.

Additional counter space and glass-paneled cabinets were built into the area separating the dining room and den.

A "mini-kitchen" in the nook that was the original laundry room houses a microwave oven and an extra sink, a cooking range, and a garbage disposal unit. When Shirley is doing "serious cooking" in the main part of the kitchen, the family uses this area for "snack attacks."

The island has a work station for appliances and a large built-in icemaker, handy for picnics and extra guests. For meals whose timing is tricky, a warmer next to the double oven keeps foods hot.

The rose and teal-blue flamestitch wallpaper in the kitchen sets the color scheme for the house. Lori Bates, a professional designer with

Jones and Herrin Architecture and Interior Design in Huntsville, helped Shirley with her selections.

The adjoining dining room continues the color plan with rose walls and teal molding. Formerly the family den, the long, elegant dining room features a Queen Anne table chosen to complement the shape of the room.

Seats of the Chippendale chairs at the end of the room are covered in fabric duplicating the colors in the kitchen wallpaper. Chinese Chippendale chairs at the table have leather seats.

From this room, dinner guests can enjoy a backyard view of the family's cotton fields through French doors that once were double windows.

In the front of the house, the rectangular living room features separate sitting areas that are defined by two large oriental rugs. A grand piano is a focal point of the room.

A back porch was transformed into a large sunroom, which the McDonalds use as a comfortable family room and den. A dramatic cathedral ceiling replaced a standard 8-foot one. A large dogwood tree and the farm's cotton fields can be seen

through a glass-paneled door and wall-to-wall windows.

At ceiling level, blue sky seen through a clerestory window is framed by the dark-paneled room. Daughter Caroline's painting blends well with the room's classic lines and rose and blue colors.

The master suite, complete with roomy sitting area, and a powder room and bath were added to the south side of the house as part of an earlier renovation. A basement area also was added then.

Two bedrooms, an office, and two baths are located on the north side of the house.

Hardwood floors highlight Shirley's antique furniture. Oriental floor coverings are a favorite collection.

"Since I can't have tall ceilings in this house, I decided to have my 'pieces of art' on the floor," she says.

Shirley says she and Albert started with three alternatives—to buy, to build a new house, or to renovate their old home.

"Of the three, we probably chose the most difficult. But we wanted to stay on this land," she says.

By **NANCY DORMAN-HICKSON** with photos by **ART MERIPOL**



*A cathedral ceiling and a clerestory window heighten the impact of the tastefully furnished family room.*

