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RHINEBECK



PAULA ANN MITCHELL — DAILY FREEMAN PHOTOS

Country Living "House of the Year" designed by Charles Petersheim, the owner of Catskill Farms.

'House of the Year' built in Rhinebeck

By Paula Ann Mitchell
pmitchell@freemanonline.com
[@anchoratfreeman](https://twitter.com/anchoratfreeman) on twitter

RHINEBECK » The turn-of-the-century inspired farmhouse on a hilltop in Northern Dutchess County certainly is something to write home about.

In fact, the editorial team at Country Living magazine is calling the Rhinebeck homestead the "House of the Year," and come September, an entire 10-page spread will be devoted to the 1,550-square-foot home and the man who imagined it.

On Tuesday morning, builder Charles Petersheim was on hand overseeing landscapers from Adams' Fairacre Farms and movers hauling in furniture hand-picked by the magazine's designers.

"It's move-in day and final decorating day with the team of editors," said Petersheim, the owner of Catskill Farms, a Sullivan County-based firm that designs and builds country homes in the Hudson Valley.

To be clear, no one is settling into the home at 601 Ackert Hook Road just now.

The three-bedroom, two-bathroom house was getting decked out because it will be open for tours June 6-8 as part of the Country Living Fair at the Dutchess County Fairgrounds.

After the fair, the magazine's trappings will be removed, and a couple from Manhattan, who recently bought it as a second home for \$400,000 will move in.

They were likely attracted to the "House of the Year" for its unpretentious and straightforward personality. Anyone seeing it could easily mistake it for a well-maintained 19th-century farmhouse on a wooded, 5-acre plot.

"This is Grandpa's home. In fact, it's inspired by Grandpa's home," Petersheim said when asked about the look of the early American architecture.

"I would be driving down the street and see homes that were distressed, with peeling paint, and Grandma's britches on the front porch, but when I'd drive by them enough times, I realized they were really beautiful homes."

Petersheim said the model for the Rhinebeck construction came from an existing farmhouse in the town of Fremont in northern Sullivan County.

"It was totally empty, and the roof was collapsing. It was a lonely, distressed house that was tiny and needed to be enlarged."

As is customary for Catskill Farms, the construction team was able to "reinvent" it — part of



Movers and the design team from Country Living magazine were working hard at the house this week, getting it ready for the Country Living Fair June 6-8.

+ **Online:** Watch a video about the "House of the Year" at DAILYFREEMAN.COM/LIFE-STYLE.

Petersheim's formula for success.

"It's a quintessential farmhouse with white siding, black trim, a wrap-around porch, double Dutch doors — a real classic and a great-looking house. We really nailed it," he said.

Reinventing old homes with modern amenities is an idea that has caught on, particularly among young urbanites.

So far, the 12-year-old Catskill Farms has built 100 homes in Ulster and Sullivan counties. The Rhinebeck home represents Petersheim's first in Dutchess County.

For the last 15 years, Country Living has been remodeling and building homes to promote as its "House of the Year." After completion, a robust feature of the process is published in the magazine for its 11 million readers.

One day last fall, an editor happened to see a Catskill Farms ad in "New York" magazine and called Petersheim.

"He said, 'Do you want to build a home for us? It would be in conjunction with our Rhinebeck Country Living Fair.' I obviously saw the opportunity ... and I had been meaning to get to Dutchess County, so it was a no-brainer."

Once Petersheim agreed, he had to find and purchase land and

then design and build a house by May. The contractor, originally from Lancaster, Pennsylvania, got busy and quickly found 15 parcels he liked and made an offer on four.

"A few weeks after that, I owned a piece of land, and we broke ground on Jan. 3."

The construction crew worked seven days a week through the brutally cold and snowy winter.

"We didn't have electric in the house until April," he said. "It was a total battle. We also had six editors who had a say in everything we were doing."

At times, that led to a tug-of-war on portions of the home, particularly the interior design, Petersheim said, but it came together and ended nicely.

"What attracted me to the magazine is they liked my financial model. I buy the land, build the house and then sell it at the end, so they were able to piggyback off that. The customer pays me at the end.

"That made a lot of sense to them, but at the same time, I took a risk. I was putting \$400,000 into this, knowing I would have to sell this house. It was a real tug-of-war, but in the end, we built a great house. It will be their 'House of the Year' and it synchronized perfectly with their fair.

The New York City couple that bought it has a 2-year-old child and will be moving in at the end of June.

"We sell to a lot of families,"

Petersheim said. "Our bread and butter is probably a 35- or 45-year-old professional couple with a child or two. We also have plenty of singles and young couples without any children as well as retired couples."

Most of them connect with him because they want an old home upstate that's in good condition — something Petersheim described as "nearly impossible" to find.

"When it comes to homes and the dream of living upstate, old is viewed as better, but the reality of that is not the same," he said.

"New homes have a reputation of being sterile and cookie-cutter and lacking personality, and old homes have a reputation of being high-maintenance and expensive, so we were able to evoke the feeling of an old and new home, and it's been a good formula."

After the movers had placed the sofas in the living room and their truck pulled out on Tuesday, Petersheim took a moment in the hustle to soak in every detail of what he built.

"My goal is to build homes that echo the past," he said. "It's like a brand new 100-year-old home and a fresh start and a fantastic way of life."

Shuttle buses will be available to take those attending the Country Living Fair to and from the "House of the Year" for tours. For more information go to www.countryliving.com.