



VICKY SANDERSON
AROUND
THE HOUSE

Cool kids have declared that incorporating black in décor and design is new, cool, edgy and chic! And they're absolutely right — except for the new part.

Black has been a striking decorative element forever, as far back as 600 B.C., Athenian potters created ornamental motifs with a form of clay that turned black during firing.

The ancient tradition lives on in a thoroughly contemporary country house architect Linc Thelen www.lincthelen.com designed and built in Rolling Prairie, Indiana for a Chicago family who wanted a rural retreat.

Also a fine artist, Thelen is known for blending architecture and art to design spaces that effortlessly merge classic and contemporary elements, whether it's a Victorian rowhouse or an urban church-to-residence conversion.

If there's a thread that runs through his work, says Thelen, it's that it begins with site. "A black house works here because it's on 80 acres surrounded by woods. I don't know that it would fit in a suburb."

Fit it certainly appears to do. In summer, the 3,200 sq. ft. structure will sit serenely among shadows made by leafy greens. In winter, its vertically orientated engineered wood siding (painted black) echoes the surrounding trees.

"We did (black) to connect the house with the woods, and to give a stronger architectural point to it," he explains, adding that he



A garage became a detached rec room, also clad in vertical siding painted black.

BLACK BEAUTY

A timeless tone defines a 21st century farmhouse

thinks the house turning its back on a nearby pond — unlike many neighbouring structures — is a plus, rather than a design drawback.

"It's nestled in the wood, so you feel like you're entering a cosy, romantic space," he says.

The project required a total gut and re-arranging of the floor plan. Exterior balconies were removed, as was a roof overhang. A garage was converted into a detached rec room, and a new pool and outdoor shower were added.



Thelen designed and built the dining room table in his shop.

To connect inside and out, Thelen used black to frame exterior views, as it does in two thirteen-foot corner windows on a dining addition, and in folding windows that wrap around an enclosed porch.

Black also serves as punctuation in light fixtures, faucets, and hardware. And it provides line breaks to stretches of minimally-decorated white spaces and sparingly-used texture — like the cultured stone on a soaring fireplace or wide, rough white

oak flooring. For more pictures, go to www.aroundthehouse.ca

Asked if he has a preference for working on a full redo, rather than tweaking an existing space, Thelen hesitates slightly.

"No matter if you are starting from scratch or working with existing, you have to connect the structure with its environment," he says. "There are always some kind of restrictions with space, so you have to understand how to maximize what you have."

The fundamental appeal of this modern farmhouse design, he says, is that it's warm and cosy without being overtly rustic and is modern and minimalist "in a way that still feels like home."

Thelen is currently designing a home with a similar sensibility in Wilmette, a northern suburb of Chicago. After that, he'll devote the rest of the year to painting full time www.lincthelenart.com. How do these two practices influence each other?

"I'm a painter, a fine artist, so I really learned to work with materials. It's not about the subject, it's about the brush work and line work. I look at each element in a space and ask, how do the materials fit, what percentage of wood do we need, do we need some metal, and how do we balance it all?"

Vicky Sanderson is the editor of Around the House, www.aroundthehouse.ca. A selfadmitted opinionista, she's been writing and talking about home decor and improvement, design and lifestyle trends for more than two decades. Check her out on Instagram @athwithvicky, on Twitter @ATHwithVicky and on facebook.com/ATHwithVicky



Fold-down windows and radiant-heat flooring extend seasonal use of the porch.



The light-filled kitchen features custom cabinetry in white oak and an island of Caesarstone and raw concrete.