



MODERN COUNTRY CHIC To complement the bucolic setting, Vincent Sagart used neutrals and wood furnishings, such as walnut tables. Modern furnishings rounded out the look, with fabrics from the Washington Design Center.

Open Country

Michael Olding just wanted land so he could join the hunt in The Plains, Va., but the house he found there was an unexpected prize.

| By *Jennifer Sergent* |
| *Photography by sagaristudio* |

As an avid foxhunter, Michael Olding has traversed miles of Virginia's woods and pastures, galloping behind hounds on the scent. In recent years, he began his own pursuit: to join the Orange County Hounds in The Plains, one of the region's most prestigious clubs.

"It's because of the reputation," says Olding, who, by day, is the chief of plastic surgery at The George Washington University Hospital. Members of the hunt, which was founded by Edward Henry Harriman in 1902—when he moved to Virginia from Orange County, N.Y.—have included Jackie O. and the Mellons, among other famous families.

To join, members must first own at least 50 acres in the hunt's territory, which they have to make available for hunting and also promise never to develop. So when Olding's real estate agent—a joint master of the Orange County Hounds—told him about a 52-acre parcel coming available, he put a contract on it, sight

unseen. He didn't care that there was a house there: "I just wanted to be able to hunt and to preserve my property," he says, noting that he's already deeded it to the Virginia Outdoors Foundation.

Olding had been told that the '70s-era rancher was a teardown, so he didn't even ask for an inspection. But when he first visited, he liked the look of the fieldstone-clad structure, nestled into the woods and overlooking prime hunting grounds from the back. He started thinking that maybe he could fix it up and rent it out. "I was elated," Olding says. "If there was a type of building material that I would have thought would be considered 'country,' it would be fieldstone."

Enter designer Vincent Sagart, who owns the modern-minded Poliform|sagartstudio in Washington. "He was one of my first calls after the banker," Olding says of Sagart, a longtime horse-riding friend. As they discussed the possibilities

“This is not German minimalist. It’s cosmopolitan, clean, simple style. ... We used very contemporary products with primary, natural materials.”

— VINCENT SAGART, CO-OWNER,
POLIFORM|SAGARTSTUDIO



for opening up the warren of dark rooms inside the small house, thoughts of renting it quickly turned into plans for converting it into a weekend retreat—a low-maintenance outpost where he could spend the night between hunts and also invite guests to stay over.

“We really wanted to do a home in the country that would be easy to have,” Sagart says. “We wanted to do something as contemporary as works for this place,” given the home’s existing style and its location deep in Virginia’s stately horse country.

Visitors driving up the long wooded driveway won’t suspect what’s inside when the low-lying stone house finally comes into view at the top of a hill. The front door opens into arching white spaces, warmed by pale, 5-inch-plank oak floors and anchored with a huge double-sided stone fireplace. Sagart and Olding opened four small rooms into one large living space, eliminating the 8-foot ceiling and expanding what

was originally a fireplace in one of the rooms into the focal point it is now, using additional stone found on the property.

In the process, Sagart installed updated lighting throughout and modern plumbing to service the gleaming new kitchen and bathrooms.

Sagart’s wife and design studio stylist, Helena, then filled the house with eclectic modern furnishings and finished the look with sumptuous fabrics from the Washington Design Center, where their studio is located; she aptly used a horsehair textile from Donghia for Roman shades and installed subtly striped sheers across the back from Pindler & Pindler. Thick, silvery silk draperies from Duralee grace the bedroom windows.

“This is not German minimalist,” Sagart says of the effect. “It’s cosmopolitan, clean, simple style,” enhanced with

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ILLUMINATIONS

The new recessed lighting “really creates an atmosphere here—it illuminates wherever you are,” Sagart says. In the spotlight are the warm, nearly glowing walnut furnishings by Riva1920.



...CONTINUED the Italian-made kitchen, bath and closet systems for which Poliform is famous.

In small ways, the design still pays homage to the home's original architecture. There's crown molding throughout, which is unusual for contemporary interiors, and the doors have traditional moldings and hardware. "I tend to go with the architecture of the house," Sagart says. "If I want to create a home that feels right, it has to be that way."

Outside, Sagart and Olding used the natural landscape as a design cue, filling in an old kidney-shaped pool and building a new rectangular lap pool farther out, framed by rocky outcroppings. Sagart used fieldstone for the terraces—a common material for traditional landscapes—but laid it vertically, giving it a modern feel.

A year after moving in, Olding says, "It's what I expected it to be—clean and easy to take care of." The only landscaping to speak of is the grass out back, while the home's wide-open interiors, free of fussy details, makes cleanup a no-brainer.

"This is a quintessential weekend home," says Sagart, who is a frequent guest. "Everybody can be doing different things, but you're all together." ■



HORSING AROUND

Expansive windows look out across the pool to acres of hunting grounds beyond, and Sagart repeated the horse theme inside. He put a rocking horse on the Baum shelving in the master bath (dressed with Carrara marble and a Poliform vanity) and placed an equine sculpture from Chile on the dining table.

