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An unusual **white pine bark laminate** is a Highland Craftsmen innovation. It's made from the thin, tough bark at the tips of braches, which would otherwise be discarded. The bark feels like leather and glows coppery red, complementing the hammered-copper backsplash.



The **balustrades** are made from rhododendron; note the bark-on stair treads. Stair designed and crafted by Marty McCurry.



Bark shingles as an interior wall covering, mottled and lichen-speckled, becomes elegant when paired with fine furnishings, and is a natural with water (opposite).

The author's own house has **bark-removed** locust porch supports and railings for a backwoods flavor.

BARK HOUSE STYLE

WHEN MY HUSBAND and I built a new home in 2008—an in-fill project on a downtown vacant lot—we wanted it to blend well with the early 20th-century bungalows around us. We wanted it to be Arts & Crafts in spirit, compact, and rich with architectural details peculiar to our location in Asheville, North Carolina.

We made an unusual choice to use poplar bark shingles as an exterior cladding . . . and since then, we've been enjoying such benefits as low heating and cooling bills, a quiet interior, and a craggy exterior that invites conversation. Several people have come to the front door and asked if they could "pet" our house. We will never need to paint or stain the bark shingles, and it's good to know that this long-lasting building material was created from reclaimed forest waste and contains no chemical additives, yet meets city fire codes.

In using bark we also learned about a variety of complementary architectural elements, exterior and interior, which carry the old-fashioned, rustic look inside. A homeowner or designer can use these elements, as we did, to "age" new construction and make it look well-seasoned. The same elements can be used to refresh an old house whose looks have been lost to endless remodeling.

Highland Craftsmen, a small North Carolina company, produced our bark shingles and also makes standardized moldings, structural posts,

poles and "twigs" for porch and stair railings, and furniture-grade bark-covered hardwood laminates of various species for cabinetry. In addition, they carry large panels of a fine-grained poplar bark, which has been used imaginatively indoors as a wall covering. It's an unusual look that harks back to the early days of bark architecture, and it's surprisingly elegant.



BY NAN CHASE

This wealth of choices assures that each project is unique and obviously handcrafted. Step into a rustic-style house with window and door trim done not in typical milled lumber, but rather in tree branches with their grey-brown bark left on, and it invites the eye and hand. Imagine an interior archway framed by distressed locust posts full of sinuous twists and turns, knotholes and bumps.

The original Bark House Style, using squared, flat bark shingles, originated in the southern Appalachian Mountains in the late 1800s, when summer homes were built with 2"-thick chestnut bark and sometimes poplar bark; some in North Carolina still stand with their bark intact after a century. An early 20th-century chestnut blight wiped out the main source of bark, and by the end of World War II the Bark Style disappeared. Today's bark house revival is a tribute to the material's inherent strength and beauty. The modern product, of fast-growth poplar, is improved by kiln drying and careful installation. ✦

NAN CHASE co-authored *Bark House Style: Sustainable Designs from Nature* (Gibbs Smith, 2008) with Highland Craftsmen owner Chris McCurry, with whom she has worked in the past.