

Leah Palmer: Puts the Puzzle Pieces in Place

By Vicky Moon

Architectural designer and drafts person Leah Palmer describes herself as a puzzle person, but her puzzles occupy very large spaces: homes, stables and kennels.

"I'd rather figure out how to move a stairway and add a small addition," she said, "and raise the roof as opposed to building a whole house."

Living in a home for years and feel that kitchen window just doesn't feel or look right? Buying a new house and want to add a game room, mudroom or great room? Palmer, who lives in Fauquier County, can make that happen.

She's a horse girl at heart but now operates her business using the names Leah C. Palmer Drafting and Design and Horse Country Design LLC. It's based at Patrickswell, a Victorian home she's remodeling for owners Joe and Stephanie Spytek off the Atoka Road near Rectortown.

Palmer, 48, a Virginia native, settled in Middleburg to fulfill her horse obsession. She rode, showed and sold horses and occasionally accompanied others out hunting. "I rode everything," she said. "And I did it myself."

At age 30, Palmer followed another lifelong ambition—to study architecture. She graduated from Catholic University with honors in 2005 with a Bachelor of Science degree in architecture, along with a heavy dose of philosophy courses. She persevered in her studies even after losing a sister in the nightmarish 2007 shootings at Virginia Tech.

At her home office, she is propped on the kitchen counter chatting about her work. She has between five and nine projects in various stages of development. And, though she's not yet licensed in architecture, she has plenty of work drafting drawings for various clients. One of her biggest clients is Joe Spytek, who has numerous properties in Fauquier County.



PHOTO BY VICKY MOON

Leah Palmer on the front porch of her home office in Fauquier County.

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"Leah was recommended to me by John Pennington of Monomoy, who quite rightly recognized that I needed a bit of help with some of my site planning and project management work on the property," said Spytek. "Leah has proven to be highly competent and reliable with tremendous local knowledge and insight."

"She's driven the permitting process with the county, designed our barn and run-in sheds and essentially developed the full site plan. On numerous occasions she's corrected our architect on matters of local ordinance and engineering. At Patrickswell, I'm basically having Leah manage the place as we work to transform it into an equestrian property."

Palmer's clients have also included long time resident, Pippy McCormick who has a circa 1800 Federal brick and stone that had "several questionable additions" and needed renovation. For singer songwriter Mary Chapin Carpenter she consulted on a major renovation and rebuilding. And, for weekenders Lisa Jacobs and Paul Brinkman, Palmer reworked a portion of their older home, which had two front doors and no hall.

Palmer has completed over 50 projects for horses, dogs and humans. She has not advertised. "It's all been word of mouth," she said. "I'm too busy for a website, I don't have a landing page."

Her work includes renovations, additions, pond placements and, of major note, the outstanding new \$700,000 kennels for the Piedmont Fox Hounds in the summer of 2015.

"The hounds will be much happier," she said upon completion of the 2,500-square foot kennels. The block structure replaced the circa 1918 wood frame facility. The perfect Palmer puzzle.