The questions that inspired this book emerged when I renovated my two-hundred-year-old farmhouse in New York’s Hudson Valley. Undoing unfortunate decisions from the 1980s repeatedly uncovered evidence of how differently previous owners had lived in this house. The original owners cooked and ate in the basement, and a ninety-five-year-old neighbor, who grew up in the house, told me that everywhere I had a bookcase, his family had a bed. As I write these acknowledgments, I am staying home trying to flatten the curve of COVID-19. I am increasingly aware of how living with a pandemic is changing how I live in my current house, but I have yet to learn which of these new behaviors will remain.

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