In the earliest days of settlement in Virginia, the materials at hand were adapted to English building styles. Timber was plentiful for framing houses. Colonists mixed clay and ground oyster shells to plaster walls, thatched roofs with locally available reeds, and floored interiors with packed earth. Early on, they used clay bricks to create more permanent structures. As settlement pushed westward and other groups joined the English, immigrants constructed log and stone buildings.

Today, early building techniques are used in Virginia in innovative ways. Charles McRaven of Free Union, Virginia, an expert in log- and timber-framed building, has also mastered blacksmithing and masonry. His home is an eclectic combination of several old log homes, salvaged stone, and new construction.

Master thatcher Colin McGhee blends traditional skill with modern environmental conservation. His work appears at Jamestown Settlement, as well as on the new houses of his clients. By harvesting Norfolk reed, an invasive species, from the Delaware coastline, McGhee eliminates the pesty plant and the need for pesticides.

When they were threatened by the construction of the Channel tunnel rail link in Kent, England, building expert Peter Massey moved several historic structures. At the Museum of Frontier Life in Staunton, Virginia, historic farmsteads from Germany and Northern Ireland were moved piece by piece and reconstructed on-site. The museum is currently reconstructing a West African village.