



AT HOME IN VERMONT

To Build a Barn

Photographs by Carolyn Bates
Story by Kathleen James

This vacation home in Stowe blends with Vermont's rural landscape.

THE IDEA CAME FIRST — to live in a house that looks and feels like an authentic barn. Next, after several years of research and reconnaissance, came the land—42 acres of rolling field and pasture in Stowe. And then, finally, the three-ring binder arrived.

“I asked the owners to show me some ideas, a few buildings they liked,” says Milford Cushman, principal designer and founder of The Cushman Design Group. “They showed up at our next meeting with a notebook stuffed to the gills with articles, information, and pictures: Working barns, historic barns, renovated barns, falling-down barns, you name it. This project was all about building a barn for a family to feel at home in—no more than that, and no less than that—without creating a cliché.”

Stephen and H el ene Rosenhek, who live in Montreal, had been renting vacation homes in Stowe for about a decade when

they decided to build a place of their own. When they found the land in Stowe Hollow, 35 acres of which are in conservation easement with the local land trust, their real-estate attorney recommended Cushman as an architect with a guiding interest in projects that preserve and reflect Vermont's rural landscape. Patterson and Smith Construction built the house, which was completed in 2006. “We wanted the house to look like it had been there forever,” says Stephen, “as opposed to an obtrusive new house that makes people say, ‘Oh, how could they do that to land? How could they put that house there?’”

Sited carefully on a gentle slope, just a few yards from a manmade swimming pond, the house has an exterior of rough-sawn vertical boards, painted a classic shade of red. The roof is standing-seam metal, in a subdued gray, and walls of windows allow for abundant natural light.

Almost all of the living space is on the first floor, which is arranged on several step-up levels; the second floor is an exercise loft that looks over the living room.

The interior walls are built mostly of salvaged barn siding, and sliding barn doors separate several rooms. The master closet (*see inset photo, above*) was built to resemble a horse stall, complete with dividers of braided metal. The spiral staircase that leads to the loft is custom ironwork, and various abandoned farm implements, found on the property, were refurbished and reinvented as chandeliers, mirrors, and d ecor.

“We're very happy with the house,” says H el ene. “It's exactly what we wanted.” “The building is art,” agrees Cushman. “We got very close to perfect on this, and I think we were all blown away by what we were able to achieve.”

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The centerpiece of the great room is a massive fireplace of Yankee fieldstone, with deeply raked joints and colored mortar, built by Underhill mason Matt Parisi. The wide-plank floors are Eastern white pine, stained with BioShield and finished with a proprietary hard wax, instead of Min-Wax and urethane. "These products are healthier, and contain less chemicals," says architect Cushman. "The finish is hand-rubbed and feels silky-smooth." An exercise loft with custom iron railings looks over the room. The structural timbers are fir.



The kitchen, dining area, and great room are open to each other, yet arranged to create a feeling of intimacy. “You don’t feel like you’re in a big, empty space,” says Stephen. “When you’re sitting quietly at the dining table, it feels somewhat private, yet you can easily chat with people in the great room or the kitchen. The floor plan makes our house a wonderful place for family and friends to be together; no one is ‘locked away’ in another room. And we love the way the sunlight plays off the interior angles and the wood.”



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The 42-acre property, most of which is now in conservation easement, was a working farm for more than a century, and the original barn still stands on a corner of the land. During construction, the builders found a rusted manure spreader buried in a former pasture; the wheel and gears were transformed into eye-catching chandeliers for the dining and great rooms. A bathroom mirror is made of another gear and some pitchfork tines. “We used local artisans and building materials whenever possible,” says Stephen. “I’d come to Milford with an idea, such as a type of slate or wood, and he’d say, ‘That would be great in Colorado, but this is Vermont.’ We were turned on by that.”

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