

NORTHERN LIGHT • As simple and solid as a country barn, a Vermont kitchen is oriented to follow the sun



THE MAIN STAIRCASE OF THIS HYDE Park, Vermont, house leads straight into the kitchen rather than the front hall because that is the room — harmoniously laid out, warmed by wood, and saturated with light — that draws Sandy Conklin first thing in the morning. “I love coming

ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN: CUSHMAN DESIGN GROUP

down and walking into the kitchen,” she says.

That is due to the sensibilities of Milford Cushman, the architectural designer and founder of Cushman Design Group of Stowe, Vermont, who planned the space. He considers the beauty of a site “a gracious gift.” And for this project, set on 100 acres with mountain views, he honored the land’s openness to the full arc of the sun

CLEAN LINES, BLOCKY shapes, and utilitarian details such as black-painted steel convey the ambience of a classic old Vermont barn. Structural 8-inch-square posts and 8-inch-by-12-inch beams are Douglas fir, finished with a Bioshield stain.

— a valuable asset in the far reaches of northern Vermont.

The kitchen is flooded in natural light from four sides: Early brightness pours into the oversize sink through an east-facing triple window; midday sun warms the eating area through the mostly glass south-facing wall; late-afternoon beams wash into the kitchen and great room with sunset colors visible from the stove. Balancing this, north light seeps in from the side-by-side laundry room and butler's pantry.

Cushman grounded his design in the image of a barn at the edge of a field, uniting the house to its environment. Like the 19th-century agrarian building that characterizes the Vermont landscape, the house is framed with massive, load-bearing timbers, and the kitchen resonates with their clean, sturdy lines. The shiplap Douglas fir ceiling is reminiscent of a barn's cribbing, while the floors are planked with warm Caribbean pine. Elegant in their simplicity, the cabinets were crafted of heart pine by Whitaker Hartt of Lake Elmore, Vermont.

The "Kodiak brown" granite countertops, with a leather-like finish, have more texture and undulation than honed granite and require less care than soapstone. Brought to market just a few years ago, granite finished this way is "as durable a product as you could find," Cushman says, "and has the feeling of being ageless."

The lack of sheen throughout the kitchen was an intentional decision. "Our goal was to have all the wood surfaces look and feel like they'd been oiled, letting the beauty of the wood be transparent," Cushman says.

A SLIGHTLY RAISED counter is all that separates the cooking zone from the eating area, enhancing the flow of light and space. Housing state-of-the-art venting equipment, the stove hood was fashioned from a sugarhouse-style steel drum by John Bornemann of LWI Metalworks in Morrisville, Vermont.



SANDY CONKLIN CHOPS vegetables at her favorite work space, the 6-foot-10-inch-long-by-3-foot-5-inch-wide island, as Lulu, a chocolate Labrador retriever, and Stella, a black Lab, hope for scraps. Topped with recycled old-growth pine, the island was designed to hold large pieces of Conklin's pottery collection as well as food prep equipment.



The hood over the range, like the black-painted hardware, continues the utilitarian aesthetic. Fashioned from a large steel drum similar to those found in maple sugarhouses, it hides sophisticated venting equipment. The blocky work island topped with recycled old-growth pine and fitted with an antique soapstone sink is perhaps the most distinctive feature of the kitchen. The pine's tight grain is a testament to the fact that the tree grew in competition with other trees in a forest.

Cushman paid attention to all the details in the kitchen's layout, with everything stored within reach of where it's used, down to the compost bucket set into a work-island drawer, so that vegetable scraps can be swept right into it. When it is full, the compost pile, and Conklin's large, well-tended vegetable garden, are just steps away

THE ONLY UPPER cupboard in the kitchen is above the island, suspended from steel pipes so light can pass over it. Glass doors on both sides allow light to pass through. The recycled soapstone sink adds authentic farmhouse character to the room.



A PANTRY COMPENSATES for the lack of wall cabinets. Both the pantry and a small laundry room beside it may be closed from view by a barn-style sliding door, hung on a black-painted steel track. A copper warehouse light by Baselite hangs in front of the door.

on the other side of a glass door.

Housing cabinetry in the pantry allowed for a maximum of glass above the kitchen counters, where cupboards might have blocked light and views. Both the pantry and the compact laundry room may be closed from view by a barn-style sliding door.

The flow of the space, the warmth of the wood, and the simple, solid barn sensibility all combine to create a kitchen that feels especially good to live in. Standing at the sink, drenched in morning light, Conklin can look out at her zinnias, watch (even hear) deer chewing apples under old fruit trees, or catch a glimpse of a red-tailed hawk swooping down over the field. The nurturing she feels in this harmony between the built and the natural environment embodies what is at the heart of Milford Cushman's approach to design — "the sacredness of everyday spaces." ■