



the EBEL'S
DREAM
a house realized

STORY: Nancy Wolfe Stead / PHOTOS: Glenn Callahan



EBEL'S DREAM



▼ West elevation



OPENING PAGES: Milford Cushman of the Cushman Design Group based his design of Chuck and Jan Ebel's Stowe home on the Vermont barn vernacular of a stone foundation topped by two wood-clad floors of usable space and cupola. The structure is modified post-and-beam, with load-bearing hemlock beams in most areas. Two-story living room walls are reinforced with steel and are designed to withstand 125 mph winds. The house is purposefully narrow, many-windowed, and has multiple porches and decks to blur the distinction between outside and in. Chuck and Jan are very close to their beloved gardens and views from any point inside.

THE WEST ELEVATION, which faces Trapp Family Lodge and Mt. Mansfield, has an old-fashioned sleeping porch (previous page) perfect for supper in late spring and fall, and reading in all but deep winter. When it is too cold or too wet to be outside, just inside is a sun-glossed sitting room (and overflow guest room) that is their second favorite reading area.



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Three decades ago, during a chaotic period when my life was becoming totally unraveled, a Salada tea bag offered this Eureka moment: "Life is what happens when you are planning other things."

It's been my mantra ever since.

But some people don't leave it to chance, so for me it's been mesmerizing to watch a couple, Chuck and Jan Ebel of Stowe, develop a plan and then set out to actually accomplish it over a series of years. The Ebel's vision? To find a way to move to Stowe while still working, build their dream house, and then ultimately retire here.

IBM brought the couple to Essex, Vt., where their plan took root. Jan, a Canadian, had come to Stowe as a child to ski and camp. She grew to love the area and soon, with time spent playing golf and skiing, so did Chuck. But what IBM giveth, IBM can also taketh away. Their dual careers then took them to Ireland and New York. Still, they never lost sight of the dream, always plotting their return with a conviction that encouraged them to find and buy the perfect house site.

The site they found, Chuck says with relish, "has privacy within a small community of homes, wonderful views, and an incredibly good location" near the Mountain Road. (Full disclosure: I was their real estate broker during this long process and have thoroughly enjoyed watching their steps to success.) ▶



◀ Living room ▼



THREE WALLS OF GLASS—that are also three tiered—bring views and sun into the living room. The interior wall, with double-sided stone fireplace, also has windows and transoms to add transparency between the living room and dining room/kitchen. Both Chuck Ebel and designer Milford Cushman are tall and enjoy the soaring height of the living room. Chuck built the shelving that displays their plate collection. Jan found the laurel branch lamp at Stowe Craft Gallery and knew it was just the right touch for the room.

MATT PARISI, A LOCAL MASON to whom the Ebels award the highest praise, built the three stories of stone fireplaces that anchor the main living areas. A large fireplace at ground level provides warmth and character for the family room. On the main floor, a two-sided fireplace allows a crackling fire to be seen simultaneously in the living and dining rooms. Upstairs, the third fireplace provides romance and charm to the master bedroom.



HARDWARE AND SCREENS were hand-forged by Richard Spreda of Stowe.



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“We had never built a house from scratch,” says Chuck. “It was hard for us to figure out what the potential of the property was.” Or to envision the specifics of the house. They wanted a home that was open and light, fit the Vermont landscape, and used local materials. The house needed to expand when their two grown children (and eventual families) visited, but also be livable and comfortable for just the two of them.



Their dilemma was how to give architectural shape to those ideas.

After deciding to interview several local architects, fate stepped in when they met Stowe designer Milford Cushman. The rapport was immediate. During that first meeting at the site, Cushman articulated his concept of how their house should interact with the setting. The Ebels were struck by his ability to organize disparate elements—“structures, gardens, elevations, viewsheds”—and to communicate his concepts in vivid word pictures they were able to grasp. He then showed them his design for a ski house that was commissioned by *Ski Magazine* in 1996 but never built.

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CHUCK LOVES TO COOK; he finds it relaxing. Now that he has retired he is happy to have dinner ready when Jan gets home from work. Jan admits she is ecstatic to have a “house husband.” The kitchen end of the room is well organized for cooking while socializing. There is ample countertop workspace for the chef and kibitzers are invited to pull up a stool. The main floor fireplace lets a crackling fire be seen from both the living and dining rooms. Two skilled craftsmen completed the custom cabinetry throughout the house. Dan McCormick was responsible for the kitchen and bath cabinets, and Whit Hartt built extensive cupboards in the mudroom and the guest bedroom.





Downstairs porch ▼



ON SUMMER EVENINGS when the setting sun is strong, dinner is often served on the screened porch off the dining room.

The first-floor guest room (at left, and below) could be converted to master bedroom. It has beautiful westerly view and light, and en suite bath.

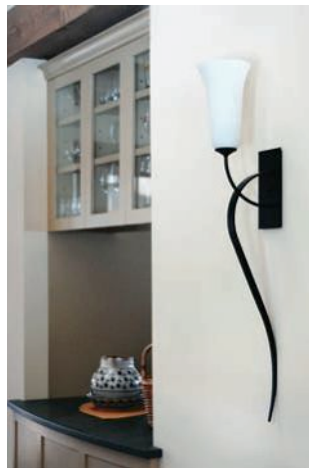


EBEL'S DREAM

Cupola stairwell ▶

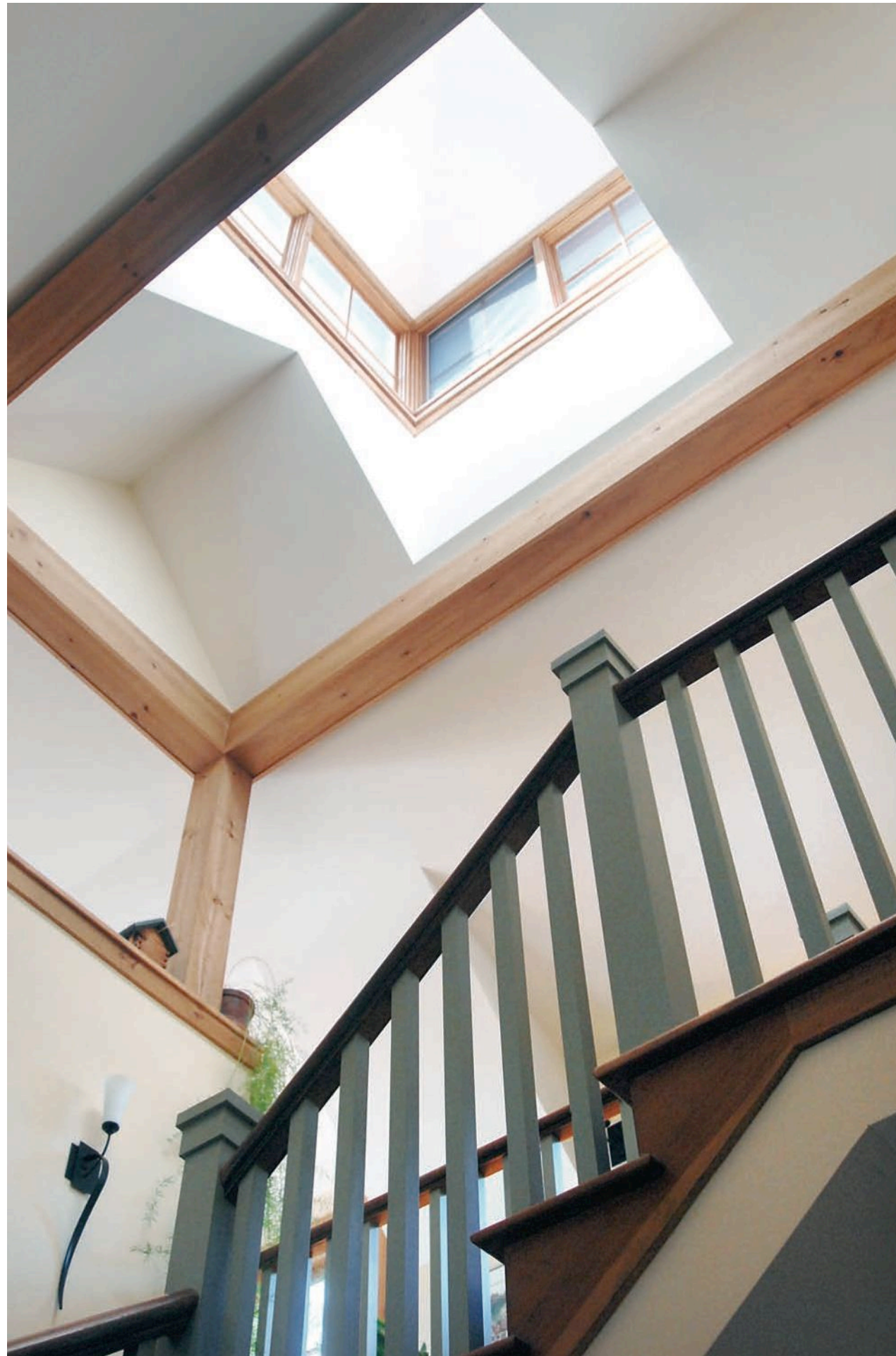


THE CUPOLA IS THE DRAMATIC finishing touch of the house design. At night it is lit by low-voltage strip lighting designed to last 30,000 hours—no need to worry about replacement—and its windows may be opened electronically on a hot summer day. Extra insulation and well-designed ventilation and circulation keep the house cool all summer.



(At top) Cushman's original treatments—some whimsical, some calculated to divert—add spikes of interest in unexpected places. In counterpoint to the sweeping staircase in the entrance hallway is a pass-through/see-through to the kitchen. It allows the

new visitor a glimpse of what is to come, and the chef to see who is coming. Jan treats the area as an ever-changing still life, with a basket of fruit, perhaps flowers, or an arrangement of fine glassware to form a welcoming composition. (Inset) An iron tulip lamp adds a touch of elegance.



JAN'S PASSION IS GARDENING. Before landscaping her new home Jan completed a course in master gardening at UVM. Milford Cushman helped with overall design; Bruce Paine and crew of Morrisville built the stone walls and walks.



That design became the basis for their home. The exterior motif is Vermont barn, a traditional three-story structure with a stone foundation, two wood-clad middle levels, and cupola on top. The south-facing entrance is softened by having the lowest level below grade, which creates a sweeping horizontal plane with a series of ascending covered decks connecting house to garage on the right and descending levels of gar-

dens on the left. The Vermont theme carries through to the interior: handsome structural beams, local slate in charcoal and shades of green used for flooring and in the baths and kitchen, and native white pine used for cabinetry, trim, and other flooring. The hallway staircase that spirals up to the cupola has the geometry and spare economy of Shaker design. Hubbardton Forge designed all of the wrought-iron lighting fixtures.

E B E L ' S
D R E A M

The house meshes comfortably with the Ebels' lifestyle. The 2,800-square feet of living space on the first and second floors is their domain. An additional 1,000 square feet on the lower level provides a generous family room, bath, and bedrooms for their adult children. The architecture provides a serene, elegant backdrop for the couple's soft spot for Americana. The house is dotted with an eclectic and whimsical array of items: an antique decoy, funky bird-houses, an old marble game, a painted wooden horse from a long-gone carousel.

The design perfectly bridges the span between the final years of work and retirement. Jan is having too much fun to stop working but is itching to get into the gardens full time. Chuck relishes his recent retirement and while he is getting more involved in local activities, he loves his kitchen, his workshop, and his home's quiet places to read.

The house is a perfect fit. ■