

When life's craziness

gets to be too much, who wouldn't welcome a relaxing escape to a mountain spa?



Majestic mountain views surround the lavish spa, which includes a SwimEx exercise pool, *right*. A double-sided wood and marble fireplace, *below, right*, warms the homeowners and guests as they soak in the large Jacuzzi or relax with a book in the sitting room/library on the other side.

One lucky Boston couple frequently leave their busy urban life behind to soak, steam, swim, work out and enjoy all the amenities of a luxurious spa. And they do it all in the comfort of their home.

Three years ago, these executives decided they wanted a private vacation haven for escaping the city rat race. Their search led them to Stowe, Vermont, where they found a spacious farm-

house-style abode with Adirondack touches. The mountain home was just right—except that it lacked a world-class spa. So they set out to add a new wing with a posh health-and-fitness facility worthy of the most demanding fitness junkie.

The transformation they had in mind included a sumptuous space for giving stress the slip. The result: a lavish spa with exercise pool, high-tech aerobic equipment, sauna, double-sided marble fireplace and hot tub

large enough for a team of sumo wrestlers. Topping it all off—literally—are wraparound views of Vermont's majestic mountains.

"Once we get here, we never want to leave because the setting is so peaceful and gorgeous," say the homeowners. "For us, it's the perfect retreat because we can get nourished by nature and enjoy the lap of luxury."

While both grew up in the metropolitan Boston area, they shared a passion for the Eastern mountains' beauty and solitude. And being practical sorts, they hoped for a retreat within a half-day's drive of Boston. They found all that and more in Stowe, Vermont: an unspoiled mountain community renowned for superb skiing and hiking.

"Stowe was a perfect fit," they say. "It's a four-seasons community with a real village feel. And we happen to think it's one of the most beautiful places on earth."

Initially, they were unsure whether to build or buy an existing home. In fact, they interviewed M.B. Cushman Design Architecture in Stowe with a new home design in mind. Then they spotted the High Beeches house.

Spa Treatment

Healthy pampering meets stylish elegance in this Stowe, Vermont, renovation.

By Jan Sheehan

Photography by Carolyn Bates



Named for the predominance of beech trees on the high-altitude lot, the three-bedroom, three-bath home offered stellar mountain views and easy access to ski slopes. "And we loved the views," they enthuse.

The residence had dream-home potential. No question there. But could it accommodate their ambitious spa plans? Milford Cushman, owner of M.B. Cushman Design Architecture and project designer for the High Beeches house, assured the couple that their wish list could be accomplished, and renovation plans began immediately.

The plans included a master suite, adjoining sitting room with two-sided

fireplace and spa with built-in pool. An unfinished basement was transformed into a "fun room" with a U-shaped bar and billiards area.

"Our clients were wonderful to work with because they were very savvy about design," Cushman says. "The challenge was marrying their dreams with the technology required for a large spa." The homeowners' standards were high. "They'd been doing quite a bit of world travel and staying at first class hotels," Cushman adds. "They wanted to duplicate something like that for themselves in Vermont."

The duplication came off flawlessly. Witness the expansive master bath,





where a round marble and glass-block shower/steam room keeps company with a Jacuzzi, double vanity, private toilet and large closet. No less impressive is the adjacent bedroom, anchored by a regal mahogany bed designed by Kent Eaton of the M.B. Cushman firm.

"The couple wanted a unique bed that was large and comfortable enough for reading and watching TV," says Eaton. "I came up with two designs. One was traditional, and the other was more whimsical. It was quite delightful that they chose the whimsical route."

The imposing bed, built by Stowe craftsman Don McCormick, sports display shelves, a hidden cabinet, curved details and a handy high-tech feature:

The TV and VCR magically rise from the footboard with the flick of a switch. "You can't find that kind of craftsmanship in a store," say the homeowners of the one-of-a-kind bed.

Complementing the sleeping area is an adjoining sitting room/library accented with a rich wood and marble fireplace. But the real star is the spa, where visitors and residents alike spend countless hours pampering body and soul while ogling nature's splendor. "It's a dramatic space with a high level of detail," says Cushman. "Yet it's sympathetic to the existing structure."

Accomplishing this was not without challenges. Restrictive setbacks required creative use of space. Fortunately, builder Michael Baumann took such

Nourished by nature in the lap of luxury

obstacles in stride. "Basically, I was the problem solver," he says. "Whatever the clients wanted, I'd find a way to do it."

Lack of building space was solved by constructing the spa wing at a 19-degree angle. Still, compromises were required. "The owners originally wanted a lap pool, but there just wasn't room for it," explains Baumann. "So they opted for the smaller SwimEx pool."

Essentially an exercise pool with a large paddle wheel allowing swimmers to splash against a current, the 18-foot-by-10-foot indoor lagoon is an up-and-coming workout contraption. "Lots of colleges use them for their swim teams," notes Baumann. "If you've ever been on a running machine, it's the same thing, except in water....It's quite a workout."

Showcasing the spectacular outdoor scenery was also a priority in the spa addition, as well as the rest of the 8,500-square-foot house. Abundant windows were strategically placed to capture a panorama of jagged sights, including Vermont's highest peak: 4,393-foot Mount Mansfield. "We didn't want the architecture to be any stronger than it needed to be because the views are extraordinary," Cushman says.

Considering the rugged views, one might expect a rough-hewn interior. Yet the decor is far from rustic. Like a genteel lady in an untamed wilderness, the style is refreshingly refined, elegant and citified. Delicate floral patterns play off exquisite furniture, ornate mir-

rors and knickknacks. The look is reminiscent of a Park Avenue apartment, which was exactly the owners' intent.

"The house isn't ski-lodgey because in many respects we regard it as our principal residence," they explain. "We plan to live here full time at some point, so it's decorated in a way that's compatible with us."

Cascades of pastel-flowered draperies dress windows, while floors wear the same pattern in custom-designed area rugs. With the help of interior designer Kathy Dever of Stowe, existing pieces from the owners' two households were mixed, matched and blended. "The look is a bit dressy," concedes Dever. "But that's the trend. Mountain retreats are getting more sophisticated all the time. Homes in Vermont used to be kind of campy and ski-housey. But it's not that way anymore."

An influx of upscale urbanites from New York, Boston and other fast-paced cities are settling down in Stowe and bringing their chic tastes with them. "This house typifies what people want in a mountain home: great views and a wonderful, comfortable place to be," Dever says.

The homeowners agree. Of course, having a personal spa at their disposal doesn't hurt. "When we travel and go to other spas, we think, 'Why are we paying money for this when we have something superior at home?'" they say. "This house has all creature comforts we need. It's not a ski house. It's a house house." ▲



The interior is refined and elegant, in tune with the homeowners' taste. As part of the renovation, an opulent marble and glass-block shower/steam room, *this page*, was added. In the bedroom, an imposing custom-made mahogany bed houses the TV and VCR in its footboard.

