

# from so-so to gee-whiz

Redesign capitalizes on home's drop-dead gorgeous views



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# When it comes to homes with magnificent views,



Stowe has more than its share. Close-up and distant views of the Green Mountains, knockout panoramas of Mount Mansfield, dramatic scenes of Stowe Mountain Resort with its classic spiderweb of ski trails, and countless others with picture-postcard vistas to fill an album. As local Realtors often exult, when it comes to views, Stowe has “an embarrassment of riches.”

Some of the best homes with views in Stowe dwell in the 650-acre development of Robinson Springs, most of which overlook Mount Mansfield and its ski runs. But there is one home in the neighborhood that boasts views that are literally out of this world.

“That’s the Horsehead Nebula, also known as Barnard 33,” says a Robinson Springs homeowner as he points out a dramatic picture from outer space appearing on an over-size flat panel television screen in his living room. >> 200

**Previous page:** This 4,000-square-foot home in Robinson Springs is artfully nestled into its dramatic hillside site. Above and right: As the awe-inspiring slopeside views from the master bedroom prove, Stowe-based architect Milford Cushman and his team followed the owners’ request to redesign the house to take full advantage of the site’s impressive vistas. The home’s total transformation included demolition of a guest wing, adding an observatory, and rearranging the roofline using the same footprint as the original house.



BEFORE

AFTER



## >> great room



### A new, two-story great room boasts

floor-to-ceiling windows to help “bring the outside in,” as well as a stucco-on-concrete fireplace and a steel chandelier designed by Cushman Design Group and fabricated by IronArt’s Brad Robertson. The candleholder is among the owner’s collection of pewter pieces.



The star-filled image is being downloaded from the owner’s professional-grade, 20-inch PlaneWave Instruments mirror telescope encased in a purpose-built, two-story, silo-like, dome-topped observatory attached to the home. He presses a few buttons on his laptop and his nearby telescope automatically zooms in on the distant scene, eliciting appreciative “oohs” and “ahhs” from his guests. “The scene you’re looking at is approximately 1,500 light years from Earth,” he tells them.

While these images from outer space are spectacular, the home’s views of Mount Mansfield—Vermont’s highest peak, but admittedly more down to earth—do not lack for drama. In the airy, spacious living room, massive two-story windows frame the slopeside views and give the home an “outside-in” feeling. Nearly every room boasts inviting outlooks.

But the home did not always have such jaw-dropping views.

I have to confess that the first time we saw this house we didn’t fall in love with it,” said the owner’s wife. (*The couple preferred not to be identified for this article.*) “It didn’t take full advantage of the lot’s spectacular views and was a bit dated. But it had so much potential.” Her husband agreed: “We loved the site, but it looked more like a home you’d find on Cape Cod than in the mountains of Vermont. However, we bought it as a vacation home in 2010, thinking we would live in it awhile before making any changes.”

Soon after they moved in to their 4,000-square-foot holiday home, the couple, who live fulltime in Cambridge, Mass., decided to modernize the kitchen. After a few years they realized the entire home needed a major renovation.

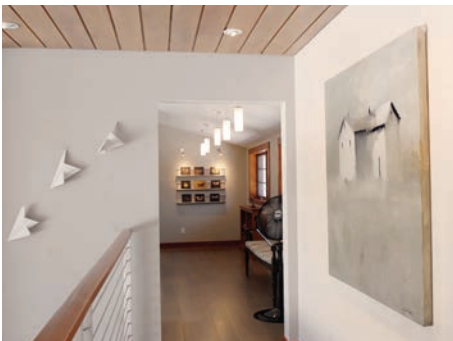
“Because the house was often battered by 75- to 80-mph winds that roared down on us from Mount Mansfield and literally shook the house, we knew it was time to upgrade some of its structural elements and weatherproof it by reinsulating it and replacing the windows,” he said.

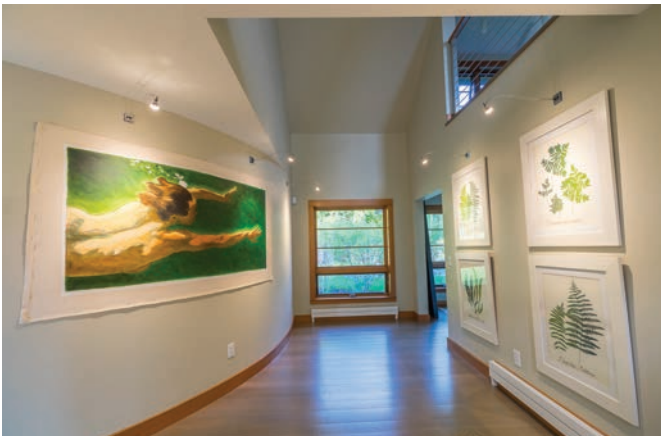
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**High ceilings in the great room open**

into the cozier one-story-high, light-filled dining room and then sunroom. An upper, open hallway provides access to second-story bedrooms, as well as open views of the great room and beyond. Artist Eric Sealine created a "flock" of fanciful Bristol-board winged objects that adorn the walls.





The owners are keen collectors—and the wife is an interior decorator—so their home is dotted with favorite pieces, such as an antique wooden coffee table and sculptural bowl in the sunroom, a metal side table inspired by a cross section of a tree, and in the light-filled gallery, selections from the owners' artwork collection, including Eric Sealine's painting of a swimmer.



**Because the kitchen was renovated**

before the home's major transformation, it was disassembled and stored away during the year-long renovation to prevent it from being damaged. The lotus-inspired, metal-and-paper kitchen chandelier was designed by Cushman Design Group and fabricated by IronArt's Kate Sprague and Kathryn Lipke Vigessa. The reclaimed beams, with custom iron brackets, were added to the kitchen area for structural reasons.





**The open-plan kitchen and dining room** both boast artful touches, such as acrylic chairs at the kitchen island, as well as glass pendant lamps with vintage Edison bulbs over the dining room table.







**To reach the home's second-floor bedrooms and observatory tower**

(at top) Cushman designed a novel circular stairway that is specially constructed to prevent any vibration that could affect the delicately calibrated high-tech telescope. At right: On the second floor the stairway is transformed into a space-saving, ship-like stairway, inspired by stairs designed by Thomas Jefferson. Stair rail is of Douglas fir and stainless steel.







Like the rest of the house the master bedroom (left) features a neutral color palette with accents of wood, and the master bathroom features a travertine tiled floor, a contemporary standing tub, as well as his and her separate, flanking vanities, designed by Cushman Design Group and made from Douglas fir and topped with Caesarstone in Lagos blue.







**A lower-level bunkroom** that features four built-in beds doubles as a kid's room, as well as a overflow bedroom for guests. A blue spread and paintings set off the home's neutral palette in a secondary bedroom.



200<< They also wanted to change the look of the house.

“We hoped for a more Western, modern, mountain-style design,” she said. And her husband had a unique feature on his “must-have” list. An amateur—but enthusiastic—astronomer, he had grown tired of lugging his 60-pound portable telescope out onto the front lawn for star-gazing. He wanted to incorporate an observatory with a state-of-the-art telescope into the home’s redesign.

To help carry out this transformation they enlisted the aid of Stowe-based architectural designer Milford Cushman. “Once we talked and they told me what they envisioned, I realized they were very open to our ideas. The redesign became a fun, collaborative effort,” he said.

## HOME

Because Stowe has so little light pollution, and because the husband was becoming increasingly interested in astrophotography, the observatory was one of the couple’s first considerations in the project. “We didn’t want it to block the view or dominate the house and agreed with Milford that it should be attached to the house in some way,” said the husband.

More ideas followed. Among the changes were a new master bedroom suite, the removal of a detached studio, new windows, a new roof and deck, and structural improvements. Before long they decided on a complete redesign and remodeling package that included everything from structural changes to a deep energy retrofit to landscape and lighting design, all of which Cushman’s team supplied. The couple moved out of the home for a year in 2013 for the year-long renovation.

“The project was a major renovation job,” said Travis Cutler, vice president at the Morrisville-based contracting firm Donald P. Blake Jr. Inc. “Not one wall was left untouched. We took the inside of the house down to the studs and even removed part of the second floor to give the owners a living and dining area with high ceilings.” To protect the kitchen, which had been renovated shortly after the couple moved in, Cutler’s crew disassembled it, including cabinets and appliances, and stored the items during the renovation.

Because of the site’s high winds and Stowe’s often-severe winter temperatures, Cushman specified triple-pane glass for windows and doors and chose closed-cell foam and cellulose insulation for walls and ceilings, with a thermal-resistance value of almost double the existing code. “We deliberately over-designed the house for the long run,” he said.

To take full advantage of the site’s dramatic views and to help “bring the outside in,” Cushman chose floor-to-ceiling windows in the great room and used western fir for all the casing material. In keeping with the redesign’s “modern mountain” theme, the wife, who has a background in interior design, partnered with Cushman’s team for a minimal design scheme, with a palette domi-

The owner is a keen amateur astronomer and this observatory allows him to stargaze year round in all types of weather.



nated by off-whites and grays. Floors are white oak stained gray.

Casing material is western fir and the ceiling is basswood, chosen because it has no grain and won’t compete with the floors. Natural materials, such as metal, steel, iron, and glass are used throughout the house. “We didn’t want to fight with the exterior but bring it in,” explained Cushman. The house is now more open than the earlier version and filled with morning and afternoon light. None of the windows, except those in the four bedrooms, has shades or blinds.

To help with the home’s signature piece, the two-and-a-half story observatory, the homeowners and Cushman turned to private observatory expert David Miller in Durango, Colo. Because telescopes have to be rock steady, Cushman designed a vibration-free foundation for the structure, a concrete cinderblock pier isolated from the home and anchored to the bedrock. A circular staircase, not anchored to

the pier to prevent vibration, leads up to the observatory.

“On a clear night, and because we are high above the tree line, the views from the telescope are extraordinary,” said the owner.

Although the redesigned four-bedroom home stands on the same footprint as the previous home, it seems larger, more open, and more expansive. And best of all, said the owners, are those drop-dead gorgeous views from almost every room.

“One of the house’s most stunning views is Mount Mansfield, which is the first thing we see when we walk into the house over the new entryway. It never fails to take our—and our guests’—breath away. We got exactly the house we had long been dreaming about. It is out of this world.” ■