

# CUSHMAN

## DESIGN GROUP



When Milford Cushman started Cushman Design Group in 1981, he was inspired by a lifelong fascination with buildings and how they are tied to place.

In the 32 years he has been in business, his projects have included a 24-house, energy-efficient subdivision in Russia and buildings in the Virgin Islands, Wyoming, Alaska, Maine, and other locations. While most of these projects (about 5 percent of his portfolio) have been at the request of his Vermont clients who have invited him to join them in out-of-state projects, for Cushman, a self-described “curious man,” the work is key to creating a buzz around his office, where nine employees including designers, an architect, and a business manager collaborate.

“Regardless of where I am, I want to know the lay of the land and how it has been used in the past,” Cushman says. Where the sun rises and sets in relation to the building,

local construction methodology, and how people work together are all important. In keeping with his homegrown philosophy, he hires local craftsmen and uses materials found within 500 miles of the job site whenever possible.

### THE CUSHMAN-CLIENT CONNECTION

Some years ago, John and Doren Dolan were scouting property for a second home in Stowe. Having already renovated a number of older houses in their home state of New Jersey, they looked forward to tackling a similar project in Stowe. Their search ended when they found a desirable lot with a building that was beyond repair.

The couple hired Cushman Design Group to design a home from scratch that would

# Elegant design Natural materials Green building practices



meet all their lifestyle needs. Before putting pencil to drafting paper, Cushman had the Dolans complete a 30-item questionnaire.

“He asked us things like, ‘Do you bake?’; ‘Will you need a sewing room?’; and ‘Do you have a dog?’” says Doren Dolan. “I answered no to the dog question, but Milford convinced us that we would wind up owning a dog, and now we do.”

The Dolans’ experience is characteristic of how Cushman approaches a project—in Vermont and elsewhere—by focusing on getting to know his clients personally, the property they have selected, and its history.

For Damon Kinzie, it took some convincing before he agreed to hire Cushman to design his home on a 22-acre parcel in Hinesburg. Kinzie, a financial advisor, was

convinced he could do it on his own and spent hours looking at design books and software. “I thought I could build a home and save that way,” he says. But he came to realize that a home improperly sited would devalue his land. “Milford sketched out some ideas and matched my home to the land, and that was huge.”

Kinzie says would-be homebuilders should consider that designers like Cushman, although seemingly expensive, can help get value back if and when they decide to sell. For Kinzie, the experience of working with Cushman was playful and more fun than he expected. “The experience was indispensable, and I have recommended him to my friends,” he says.

Marian Wright, a self-described “type A

who knows what she wants,” hired Cushman to transform her 1800’s fishing cabin on Lake Caspian from something dark and practical to an energy-efficient retreat known as Haven.

“We wanted to take advantage of the site,” says Wright of the vision she shared with Milford Cushman. Their goal was to have less of a separation between the indoor space and the outdoors, with lots of big windows to open up the house, which is surrounded by water on three sides. It was also important that the place not be an eyesore, according to Wright. The camp is now completely green, with almost everything sourced within 500 miles of the site, including wood milled from trees purchased locally. The cabin has a new roof and added insulation. In addition, all the glues, paints, and finishes are non-toxic.





Previous spread: This residence in Hyde Park, designed by the Cushman team, shows thoughtful use of natural materials, abundant natural daylight, the employment of talented local craftsmen, as well as a wonderful color palette. The home also features passive solar orientation, triple-glazed Loewen windows and doors, R-30 wall insulation, R-60 roof insulation, and radiant floor heating from an efficient Viessmann boiler.

Left: Deep and bracketed hipped roofs on this home called Kuma Lodge create shadows and broken horizontal lines. The textured siding and roof materials, natural colors, and asymmetrical forms echo the picturesque quality of the land on which the house was built.

Above: Damon Kinzie's design requests for his Hinesburg home were to preserve all healthy trees, to nestle the house into the site and not dominate it, to have a big summer porch with views to Camel's Hump, and a relatively open main-level floor plan.

The Cushman Design team, from left: Milford Cushman, founder and president; Nick Skwira, designer/drafter; Ryan Beaulieu, designer; Kelley Osgood, designer; Todd Randall, drafter; Terri Gregory, interior design specialist; Chad Forcier, project manager; Andrew Volansky, architect/project manager; Nita Hultstrom, business manager. Photo by Lindsay Raymondjack.





Wright, who has renovated a number of historic properties over the years, appreciates how Cushman thinks about the customer. “Architects want to design the perfect-looking house without considering how you want to live; Milford, an architectural designer, thinks about what you need at every turn.” Wright has become good friends with Milford and his wife, Terri, an interior designer. “He was never smug about my input,” she says. Wright has another project planned in her hometown of Rye, New York. “There are a lot of architects down there, and I think I will probably hire Milford.”

### BALANCING DREAMS AND FINANCES

Even though Cushman is a design firm, its biggest challenge is almost always managing expectations. “The design work is easy; the true work is balancing financial issues with the reasons people want to build,”



notes Cushman. “It’s all a marvelous unraveling and discovery that is occasionally challenging.”

“Sometimes there can be a disconnect when clients have to adjust their dreams in keeping with what they can spend,” Cush-

man says. In addition, clients’ wishes are often dictated by whether the land is raw and undeveloped or has already been developed. Many older buildings were not built to accommodate the current desired purpose, and certain corrections have to be made to try to





Clockwise from top: John and Doren Dolan commissioned Cushman Design Group to design a traditional-style home based on Vermont's Greek Revival heritage. A full-time residence, called Farmhouse Revival, the building composition consists of an original main house, several additions, and an attached barn that now serves as a garage.

The owners of this home were influenced by the architecture they had seen in their travels around the world. The design resulted in tranquil spaces within and a building form that would meld into the natural beauty of the site.

When Marian Wright commissioned Milford Cushman to design the renovations to this early 1900s fishing camp, they set forth to provide a clean, modern refuge that still speaks to the simple charm of the original camp vernacular, while using locally sourced green building components.

incorporate the old with the new.

Blake Hackerson, owner of New School Builders in Waitsfield, worked with Cushman Design on a substantial renovation. Such projects revolve around both physical and structural integrity, he says. "The goal is to make it look like the building

has always been there, seamlessly blending old and new elements."

Hackerson says he has never worked with a better architect than Cushman's Andrew Volansky, who also happens to be a fly-fishing buddy. "He came up with solutions for tricky problems; they thought everything

through." While Cushman's services are not inexpensive, Hackerson argues that spending a little more up front can help avoid costly unintended consequences down the road.

Once all the pieces come together—reasons for building, client personalities, sustainability concerns, and learning about lifestyle goals—





Cushman aspires to create what he refers to as a “just big enough house” that balances budget and square footage with what clients want and what they have to spend. “It is easy to be seduced by design work, but it is more important to understand what the clients want and what they can pay for. The architecture we create is contextual. We seek to produce designs that are durable and enduring, classic without necessarily being traditional.”

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