

# JUST BIG ENOUGH

longtime stowe architectural designer builds  
new home to 'age in place'



# as milford cushman

sits back on his comfy living room couch

inside his newly built 2,400-square-foot, three-bedroom Hyde Park home with his wife Terri Gregory, the well-known Stowe-based architectural designer tells a visitor, “We’ve decided to call this home Yellow Birches for the wonderful trees that surround us.” He pauses for a beat, smiles, and adds, “There’s another way we describe it. We call it ‘a just big enough house’ because that’s exactly what it is—not too big, not too small, but just big enough.”



Cushman, 75, confesses that he and Gregory had no plans to sell their former—much larger—home, Raven Beach, until a few years ago. “After completing a major renovation on it we thought we’d be there forever. It was gorgeous. It was like living in a park,” says the award-winning designer. “But then, one day, we realized that maintaining the home, with its 10 acres of forest and its 5,000 square feet of gardens was going to be a bigger and bigger challenge the older we got. We decided that we

needed a home that was simpler, easier to live in, and not as expensive to take care of. And we wanted a design that would allow us to age in place.”

The couple’s work—Gregory is an interior design specialist—has long been based, as Cushman says, “around our clients’ yearning to be healthy and happy and content with their surroundings, physically, psychologically, and spiritually. So, we took that same approach when we set out to design our new home.”

story, p.222 ■ photographs, p.206 >>



**THE 26-GAUGE GALVALUME** standing seam shed roof allowed for banks of windows to fill the home with light. Tell Gregory of Gregory Construction built the house, designed to give the south-facing side the longest access and which is fronted by the home’s easy-to-maintain 5-foot by 10-foot raised beds. “The garage bays were turned to organically fit with the site,” says house designer and owner Milford Cushman of the Cushman Design Group. The siding is one-by-10-inch band sawn, novelty profile shiplap in eastern white pine, fashioned with a modern corner trim. Opening spread: Guests enjoy the home’s quiet location at dusk around a Solo Stove firepit.



**THE OPEN-PLAN LIVING**, dining, and kitchen area, just 16-feet wide, provides intimacy, and with “windows on both sides, the nearly 10-foot-high room is filled with light, and you are inexorably and immediately connected to the outdoors,” says Cushman, shown above with his wife and interior designer Terri Gregory.

The custom Baltic birch dining table, designed by the Cushman Design Group, was built by Whit Hartt Cabinetry, and is lit with 24-inch Nelson saucer lights that perfectly complement the Kusco Disc pendant lights over the sink and kitchen island. Dining chairs are by Blu Dot Racer; low-back counter stools by Stua Onda.

The island accommodates the rangetop, serviced by a small Faber Bella Isola kitchen hood. The maple cabinetry by Cookshire Cabinetry came from Country Home Center, as did the prefinished solid maple flooring. The Hearthstone Tula woodstove easily heats the super-energy efficient home.

# PATH WAY



**SATIN NICKEL KITCHEN** drawer pulls compliment the brushed silver gray granite countertops, and stainless steel refrigerator, wall oven, and dishwasher. Hallway lighting is a Hubbardton Forge Exos double shade pendant. The entry hallway splits the master bedroom from the kitchen, dining, and living areas.



**TERRI GREGORY CHOSE** a neutral palette of grays and off-white tones so as not to detract from the native wood, marble, and slate used throughout the house. Window treatments and trim were kept to a minimum to not obscure or conflict with the home's near and distant views.

A Roche Bobois Long Island sofa offers plenty of space to lounge while reading, napping, watching TV, or simply gazing out the wall of windows. The simple, yet elegantly appointed living space features a Blu Dot Pi coffee table, Ekornes side chair, floor lamp by Artemide, and Corsivo wool rug.

The kitchen sink—72 inches!—features a Franke Pescara faucet in satin nickel. The 36-inch Wolf cooktop is fired by propane.



# PORTICO



**THE SCREENED-IN PORCH**, accessible from the main living area, leads to a small open deck. The comfy chat table and chairs are by Aluminum.

LWI Metal Works fabricated the lights from a Cushman Design Group design.



# WATER CLOSET



## AT 75, CUSHMAN WANTED

a home where he could “age in place.” For example, interior doors are all pocket doors, making it easier for a wheelchair-bound person to open, and the shower has no curb.

The undermount sink by Nameeks, above and far right, features a polished chrome Crosswater London Taos faucet on a brushed Donatello countertop. The 30-inch sconce is Elementum by dweLED.

The guest bathroom’s wall-mounted vanity, near right, is by Duravit Ketho and the fun, round mirror by Miraz offers its own light source. Radiant floors are polished concrete by Vermont Eco Floors.



# THE SACK



**PHOTOS OF EXUMA**, Bahamas, shot by the owner, bring a pop of color to the master bedroom's muted color palette. A corner window brings the outside in. The energy efficient ceiling fan, Haiku, like its counterpart in the living area, is by Big Ass Fan Company.

# GUEST QUARTERS



**THE QUEEN BED**, dressers, and bedside tables, above, are by Blu Dot, with matching bedside Tolomeo table lamps by Artemide.

One of two guest bedrooms features a Copeland Furniture sleigh bed, framed bedside tables crafted by Whit Hartt from a Cushman Design Group design, and finished with a framed print by Ogden Pleisner.



# MUD ROOM



**A CUSTOM BENCH**, handcrafted by the owner, above, graces the home's clean, uncluttered entryway, with porcelain tile floors and a hog wire railing from local fabricator Andy Languerand.

Cushman hangs a coat in the ample, well-organized closet, with hardware by Rustica.

In the "mud room," hats and jackets hang from hooks set into a wall of pickled eastern white pine. The wood rack was fabricated by Brad Robertson of Ironart.



While Cushman and Gregory produced “loads” of sketches as they collaborated on the design of their new home, both admit they were hugely inspired by a recent Cushman Design Group project, a modest, open-plan fishing cabin the firm had completed for a client in rural northern Vermont.

“I liked its shed roof because it helped open the cabin to the outdoors,” says Gregory. “We both loved the cabin’s intimacy and the way it was connected to the land. Most of all, we admired the cabin’s simplicity.”

First, the couple drew up a list of must haves for their new home. “We wanted to be within a half hour of Stowe, have access to southern (winter) light, and we needed high-speed internet service,” says Cushman. Accessibility was also a key part of the design plan. For example, doors had to be wide enough for a wheelchair and a stairway large enough to perhaps one day accommodate a stair lift. After finding land just a few miles from their former home, they put pen to paper and soon broke ground.

Taking their cue from the fishing cabin, the pair opted for a shed roof because, as they explain, this would allow for banks of windows that would fill the home with light. They also chose to keep the house narrow to cut down building costs. The open-plan living, dining, and kitchen area is only 16-feet wide.

“Sixteen feet is a really sweet dimension,” explains Cushman. “It is intimate and with windows on both sides, the nearly 10-foot-high room is filled with light, and you are inexorably and immediately connected to the outdoors. The proportions are perfect.” He also notes that the narrow size allows the use of two-by-12 joists and rafters, rather than more expensive larger pieces.



Because the home is smaller than their previous one, the couple spent a lot of time “editing” and making an inventory of what furniture would or wouldn’t fit in the new plan. “The dining table was too big, and it had to go,” says Gregory.

Cushman adds, “This really gave us a new appreciation for what a client goes through when they are deciding on the design of a new house. You need a lot of discipline, and it is important to decide as a couple, so the new design satisfies both of you.”



Keeping to a budget also involved sacrifices. “We had a Sub-Zero refrigerator in the other house but that was too pricey,” says Gregory. “I admit I miss it.” Ditto a fireplace—too costly. But the kitchen does have something both have long wanted: a 6-foot long, his-and-hers double workstation sink. “We can cook together and not get in each other’s way,” jokes Gregory.

Because aging in place was also a prime design consideration, the home includes many accessibility-related features. For example, all interior doors are pocket doors, which are easier for a wheelchair-bound person to open than standard doors. The master bedroom is on the main floor. (Two more bedrooms are on the home’s lower level.) The home’s front door and entryway are wide and flat enough to easily accommodate a wheelchair, and the shower has no curb, making it easy to roll into.

“The idea was to design a home that a non-ambulatory person can stay in longer than a standard home,” says Cushman. “This design should also increase resale value because there are more and more of us who will be looking for places that are

more readily accessible as we age.”

Gregory chose a neutral palette of grays and off-white tones that would not detract from the native wood, marble, and slate that was used throughout the house. Window treatments and trim were kept to a minimum so as not to obscure or conflict with the home’s near and distant views.

“The simple design helps bring the outside in,” says Gregory. A narrow screened-in porch, accessed from the main living area, leads to a small open deck. Both overlook the perennial

**TERRI GREGORY** harvests garden bounty from her raised vegetable beds. When the couple downsized to this house, they cut their garden space by nine-tenths.

The outdoor wall sconces on the garage came from Kichler. Bruce Paine laid the multicolor bluestone walk.

gardens, which are one tenth the size of the couple’s gardens in their previous home, and the forest and mountains beyond.

Thanks largely to the couple’s experience and skill in keeping the design straightforward, construction, handled by Tell Gregory of Morrisville-based contractor Gregory Construction, went smoothly. “There were no huge surprises or setbacks in this project,” says Gregory, Terri Gregory’s nephew. “I am sure that was due to Milford and Terri’s years of experience.”

The builder acknowledges the home was designed to be “super tight.”

He explains, “We exceeded insulation guidelines by a lot; the R-factor is more than double what the codes ask for.” The extra spray foam insulation in the walls and ceilings has paid off; even on the coldest of winter days the main floor of the home can be heated solely by a small but remarkably efficient Tula wood-burning stove.

“We go through less than a cord of wood a winter,” says Cushman.

Just as they were with their previous home, the couple was adamant about protecting the trees on their lot. Indeed, they even moved their first planned home site so they wouldn’t have to remove some elegant yellow birch trees.

“In my design process the land is always the starting point,” says Cushman, who was once an Outward Bound wilderness instructor. “The most exciting designs take their lead from the surrounding land, not from traditional floor plans. The site, the land, is sacred.”

Case in point: When they encountered thick ledge while excavating for the foundation, they decided against blasting—“Too disrespectful to the land,” says Gregory—but supported part of the home with concrete piers. Just 2.5 acres of the 17.5-acre lot was developed; the rest was untouched.

Milford Cushman has long claimed that one of the primary goals of contemporary design is to use materials to foster a sense of comfort, to help homeowners feel like they are in a sanctuary. In fact, it’s almost his mantra.

As he looks out the bank of south-facing windows from his maple-floored living room to the nearby perennial gardens and trees and the more distant mountains, he smiles and admits, “A sanctuary. Yes, that’s exactly what we’ve created here.”

Not bad for a house that is, as Cushman says, “Just big enough.” ■

*Photos courtesy of Cushman Design Group and photographer Ryan Bent.*