

BY PAMELA HUNT

## Bringing expertise and knowledge to clients' visions

Cushman Design Group of Stowe, Vermont, strives to mesh its more than 30 years of residential, commercial, interior, and landscape design experience with its clients' visions and budgets to create designs that are beautiful, efficient, and sustainable.



# CUSHMAN DESIGN GROUP



The architecture of this home sets a quiet and sophisticated stage for playful and energetic interiors by SATA Interior Design. The expansive triple-glazed windows allow for a magnificent connection to the spectacular views. The design of the beams and lighting skillfully allows for an open layout while creating intimacy in the dining space.





#### COLLABORATION IS THE KEY

The Cushman Design Group doesn't push a signature style. Instead, the group encourages its clients to collaborate on the direction of the final product. "Professional design service is centered around using our experience, knowledge, and intuition to guide the design process to take advantage of opportunities," explains project manager Chad Forcier.

Many clients these days come in with ideas of their own. "Our clients have access to so many information resources for inspiration, we are finding that they are able to contribute much more to the design process," says architect Andrew Volansky. Traditional sources, such as design magazines, and social media sites like Pinterest and Houzz can serve as "virtual scrapbooks for clients to catalog their ideas as well as research a multitude of solutions," adds designer Kelley Osgood.

For a recent residential project, the group worked closely with the homeowner, who provided interior design services for the house.



Proper design of lighting and LED is an integral part of our residential and restaurant design. Illuminating objects creates an intimate, inviting space, and multiple sources of light reduce glare.



Combining warm-hued natural materials, such as the wooden cabinets and flooring and granite countertops, with the bright and playfully colored accessories imbues the open interior space with a sense of joyful peace. The numerous windows bring in plentiful daylight and provide a picturesque view of the surrounding landscape.

The owners of Grazers, a new restaurant in Maple Tree Place in Williston, worked with Cushman Design Group to create an open, inviting space for its patrons. The final design perfectly complements the eatery's commitment to farm-to-plate service. Not only are the edible ingredients locally sourced and produced—visitors dine surrounded by cast-on-site concrete

countertops and floors, Eastern hemlock timber accents, and Vermont-produced tables and chairs.

#### THE BENEFITS OF USING LOCAL PEOPLE & PRODUCTS

Sourcing building materials close to home “continues to be an increasing priority for our clients,” says Andrew. “Natural wood and stone permeate our work,” adds Chad. Using these Vermont-made products and artisans “creates meaningful context to the built environment.”

The group has also seen a client shift from “bigger is better” to a more reasonable

and sustainable house size, and they promote the “just big enough” principle, which means making every square foot count.

“The push to reduce one's carbon footprint or manage a tight construction budget due to rising construction costs or stretching retirement dollars has contributed to redefining the limits of building size.”

A tiny house can still impact the community's economy in a big way. According to Andrew, “Regardless of size, the use of local materials and local craftspeople remains a paramount aspect of sustainable design, specifying materials indigenous to our region and therefore reducing the demand for



Above: In compact spaces, careful design of circulation between rooms is important to eliminate extra square feet. Here the lines are blurred between living room, kitchen, and dining room. Right: Clients continue to want a traditional gathering space with fieldstone fireplace, wide-plank wood floors, timbers at the ceiling, and warm colors on the walls.

fossil fuels to acquire and integrate these materials into buildings.”

#### ENERGY SAVINGS & HEALTHY ALTERNATIVES

In addition to striving to source goods and services from our region, Cushman Design Group incorporates energy-efficient materials and healthy-building design in its work, both to benefit the environment and to keep clients’ future utility costs in check. From keeping abreast of building technologies to designing thermally efficient spaces with proper ventilation, the team looks for ways to include energy-saving, healthy alternatives in every project.

One such innovation that has become more economically feasible for clients is LED lighting. This technology “has allowed us to provide whole-house light-

ing for a small fraction of the electrical use of ‘old’ filament-based lighting. LED lighting has also allowed us to pursue our strict demands for quality and efficiency that fluorescent bulbs could not meet,” says Chad.

LED lighting is featured in the residential design mentioned above, as well as in the remodel of the space that has become Phoenix Table & Bar in Stowe. This Mountain Road restaurant is 100 percent lit by this highly efficient lighting, “significantly reducing the restaurant’s electrical consumption,” says Kelley.

Going hand-in-hand with the desire to use less energy is the demand for healthy buildings. Although some products used in the past, such as lead paint and asbestos, performed well, looking good and holding up for decades, the dangers associated with them made them less desirable if not illegal. Many new products can provide homeowners and business owners with





Above: The materials in this compact kitchen consist of locally fabricated countertops and locally sourced spruce floors. Center: The screened porch with natural white cedar posts and copper roof is the heart of this lakeside complex. Right: A “tiny” house (150-square-foot plus sleeping loft) makes for thoughtful living and simple lifestyle choices.

alternatives that are visually attractive and promote a healthy interior.

Acoustic ceilings create a refreshing living space by absorbing excess noise, which can contribute to a stressful environment. At Phoenix Table & Bar, the designers “emphasized acoustic treatment to further enhance the dining experience,” says Kelley. This type of treatment “has become a standard recommendation to our [restaurant] clients. It is our experience that a well-designed acoustic space will improve user experience and create a more relaxing and enjoyable environment for both customers and staff,” adds Andrew.

Clients are also expressing their preferences for low-VOC paints and stains to reduce the offgassing of chemicals long after the building project is completed. “The limitations of vinyl products and urethane-based finishes or even drywall have become commonplace,” says Andrew.

While natural products often come with





a higher price tag, he says, “Clients are stretching their budgets and opting for wood and stone finishes and triple-glazed fiberglass windows whenever possible, as well as addressing indoor air quality by means of mechanically controlled ventilation to provide clean fresh air in their homes.”

#### OVERCOMING OBSTACLES & MEETING CHALLENGES

Every success is gained by overcoming obstacles. One such hurdle Cushman Design Group has encountered is the higher price tag on materials and construction methods that, in the long run, will save money and have less impact on the environment.

As Andrew describes it, “One of the most challenging aspects of the job is working with owners, contractors, and subcontractors to make sense of and understand the techniques involved with achieving high-performance homes that far exceed baseline energy codes. Highly efficient mechanical systems, proper air sealing, moisture mitigation, and upgrading insulation are good places to start. Clients need to be informed about the initial costs related to building these highly energy-efficient buildings as well as how these investments can pay long-term dividends.”

Whether a remodel of a residential home or the ground-up design for a commercial project, Cushman Design Group is experienced in meeting the challenges of combining its expertise with efficient, sustainable design and the client’s dream to bring the project to life. “We see an existing home or piece of land as a series of opportunities,” says Chad. 

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