



AT HOME IN VERMONT

Work in Progress

The Hyde Park home of designer Milford Cushman reflects his philosophy and hands-on sweat equity.

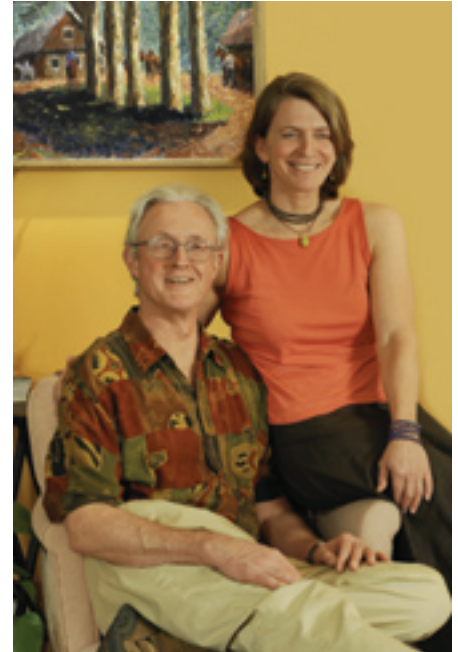
Story by Kathleen James
Photography by Carolyn Bates

MILFORD CUSHMAN'S HOME in Hyde Park is much more than a building. It's a three-dimensional expression of his life's work, his passions, his philosophy—and his hands-on sweat equity. Cushman, a leading building and interior designer with clients from Vermont to the Bahamas, built the house himself, starting in 1985. It began as a modest 960-square-foot cabin, placed carefully between towering pine trees on a piece of land he named Raven Beach, for its geologic origins in an ancient sea. Over the years, Cushman and his wife, the potter Terri Gregory, have thoughtfully expanded the house

to 1,200 square feet and added an outbuilding for gardening and storage and a two-story studio, where Terri works with clay and experiments with colors and wood stains for their clients. Milford paints there, too.

"I have a profound desire to create buildings that fit into the landscape, that take advantage of the natural surroundings and are harmonious with the sun," he says. "I look to the land and to the light; to me, the land is sacred. The land speaks loudest and first. Raven Beach represents the deepness of that philosophy."

To understand Raven Beach—and



Above: Milford Cushman with his wife and business partner, Terri Gregory. She is a well-known potter and also works at Cushman Design Group as an interior design specialist.

Below: Over the years, they have replaced most of the original ceiling sheetrock with beadboard to give the house a seaside feel. In the living room, the fireplace hearth and mantel are black limestone quarried on Isle La Motte.



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The house at Raven Beach has a dynamic connection to the land. Cars are parked behind an outbuilding; you approach the house beneath a peaceful pergola or up the curved stone steps. The landscape includes graceful stone walls, a wooden deck on several levels, a *koi* pond, and a meadow. A long-standing priority: Preserving the tall pine trees.

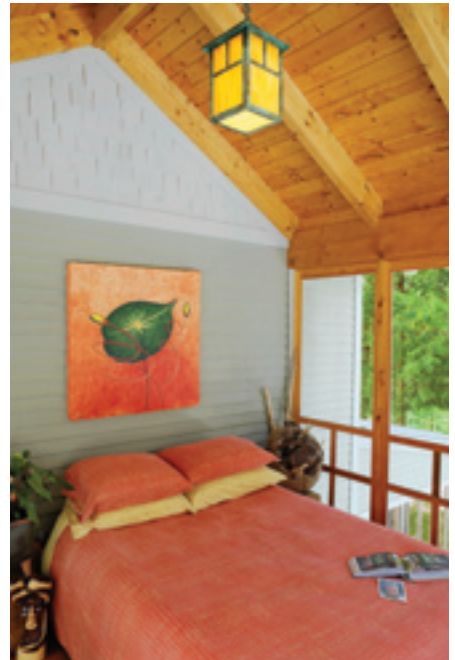


the philosophy Milford brings to his clients at the Cushman Design Group, based in Stowe—it helps to know a bit about Cushman, whose life path has wandered to some interesting places. He grew up in central New Jersey and graduated from a small liberal-arts college in Pennsylvania. In the late 1960s, he led bicycle tours through Vermont and felt an intuitive connection with the state. “The geology and people, the agriculture and woodland and water, the long history of the state and its architecture—these things were comforting and compelling,” he says. The

next fifteen years of his life included three years as an Outward Bound instructor in northern Minnesota, an artist residency at Iowa State University (Milford painted then with acrylics, in the style of abstract expressionist Morris Lewis), a bareboat sailing trip along the Eastern seaboard, and a job as assistant manager of Eastern Mountain Sports in Burlington.

In 1981, some friends connected Milford with Silver Ridge Design, an architecture firm in Hyde Park. Cushman signed on as a consultant, in a return to his long-standing interest in

architecture. “Starting in ninth grade, I had a drafting board in my bedroom,” he says. “Silver Ridge Design represented an opportunity for me to recommit to my love of buildings and design.” At the same time, he bought the land at Raven Beach and began to plan his own home. “I had lived in a lot of places—trailers and camps and shacks and a cabin I had built in Hyde Park,” he says. “I was ready for a piece of land and a place to call home. I had very little money, and I knew the only way to achieve what I wanted was through my own time and labor.” So Cushman



From early spring through late fall, Cushman and Gregory move their bedroom to the screened porch. One of Milford's paintings hangs above the bed.

and Gregory, whom he had recently started dating, got to work.

The most interesting aspect of Raven Beach is its relationship to the land—a graceful and dynamic connection to the natural world. “We were told we could never plant our house amongst all those trees; the trees would die,” says Cushman. “Well, that was simply not true. I’ve built cabins in the wilderness and run water lines over bare rock ledge. I’ve learned over the years that there are many ways to get something done while remaining deeply respectful of the land. You make a conscious commitment to that. Then all the things that are possible emerge, and the things that are impossible fall away.”

Raven Beach is planned so that cars are parked out of sight; you walk to the house from behind the outbuilding, making what he calls a “mindful approach” past low fieldstone walls, up a curving set of stone steps or beneath a peaceful pergola. The landscaping plan, which evolved over the years, now includes a small *koi* pool and meadow, a wooden deck that connects over several levels, and a collection of trees, shrubs and flowers that offer a changing color palette through the seasons.

From early spring to late fall, Milford and Terri move their bedroom to a sleeping porch on the northwest corner of the house. With screens on three sides, the room is as close to the

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The social center of the home is the open living and dining room, where the harvest table is set with pottery by Gregory. It's heated by a woodstove in winter.

outdoors as you can get. "This is the place where Terri and I become refreshed and rejuvenated," he says. "The night air and sounds, while occasionally stormy, are an antidote to the long winter, when we are essentially isolated from nature."

The small home is long and narrow, with an open living and dining room at its center. This convivial space is heated by a woodstove in winter, and ample south-facing windows fill the home with light, warmth and views all year round. The interior design is simple yet sophisticated, with saturated colors and lots of wood; over the years, the couple has replaced most of the original sheetrock on the ceiling with painted beadboard to give Raven Beach

a cottage feel and evoke its seaside name. The long harvest table is set with Terri's pottery. Paintings by Milford and Maarja Roth and other artists, such as Stowe painter Don Hanson, bring the walls to life.

"The other day, I visited three of our current projects," says Milford. "As I was walking around, I was reminded of how profoundly my work has been influenced by Raven Beach. My home is simple and straightforward and modest. It's honest. It represents my hard work and sore muscles and all of the experience that I have gained along the way. It's a reservoir of knowledge." 🍷

Kathleen James is editor of *Vermont Magazine*. She lives in an 1856 farmhouse in Manchester Center.

The Cushman File

Milford Cushman is principal of Cushman Design Group, a building design, interior design and planning firm based in Stowe. His wife, the well-known potter Terri Gregory, joined the firm several years ago and now works with Milford as an interior design consultant. The office is located at 100 Mountain Road in Stowe; call (802) 253-2169 or go to www.cushmandesign.com.