



AT HOME IN VERMONT

Story by Kathleen James
Photography by Carolyn Bates

Work at Home

Architect Joan Heaton puts her design ideas into action at her family's house in Lincoln.



The porch, with its pergola roof and comfortable Adirondack chairs, is one of the family's favorite places to hang out in warm weather.

BRISTOL ARCHITECT Joan Heaton likes to work in a style best described as the New Vernacular, a freewheeling combination of traditional forms and modern sensibilities. From the outside, a Heaton home may look like an historic Vermont farmhouse, while inside, it's light and airy, with a wide-open floor plan and eclectic materials. "I like to borrow classic forms and put them together in unexpected ways," she says. "I work

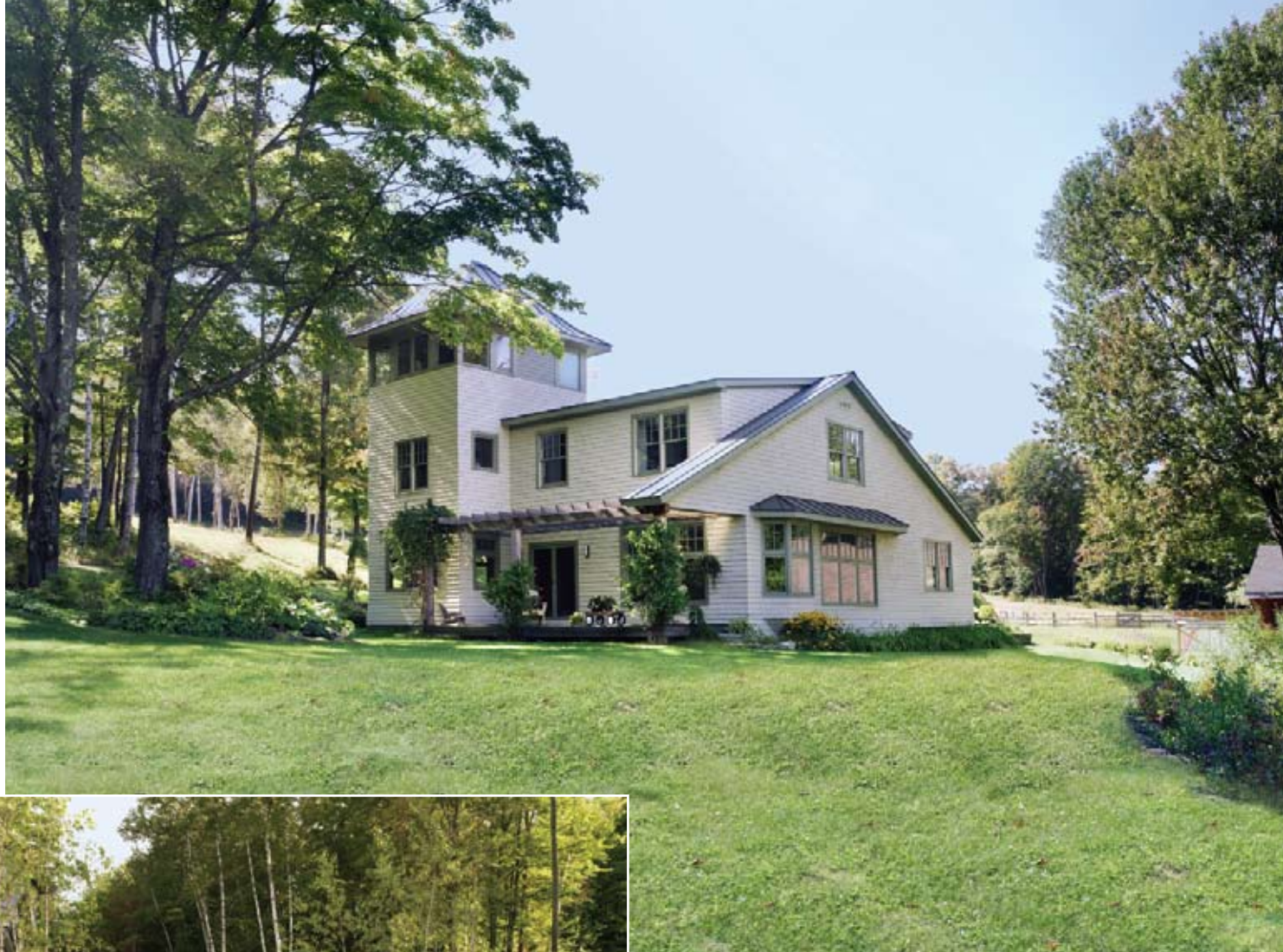
with elements of old and new."

When it came to her own home in nearby Lincoln, she had plenty of old to work with. In 1999, she and her husband, general contractor Andrew Furtsch of Bald Hill Builders, undertook a major renovation of the nondescript ranch-style house Andrew had owned since his bachelor days in the late 1980s. "It wasn't historically significant, but we couldn't bring ourselves to tear it down," says Heaton.

"So we basically built a new house right around it."

When working with clients, Heaton uses a "sustainable design checklist." Her own home contains many of these eco-friendly elements: It's built on previously developed land, the addition is sited off the south side to take advantage of passive solar heat, it's well-insulated with cellulose, the appliances are energy efficient, and the heating system includes a high-

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Above: In this photo, the two small windows at far right, in the back corner of the house, are what's left of the original building; the old roofline peaked above them. The 1999 addition included living and dining rooms on the first floor, three second-floor bedrooms, and an exercise room in the third floor of the tower. **At left:** Last year's project was a stone patio.

efficiency boiler with radiant heat and recycled cast-iron radiators. They also heat with a woodstove and will soon install a solar photovoltaic system on the south-facing roof of the garage. When it comes to building materials, they used a fun combination of old and new—from salvaged barn doors to stainless-steel stair rails—and favored woods that are durable and local, like native ash and maple.

“When I started my business, clients were very interested in old

farmhouses,” says Heaton, who opened her solo practice in downtown Bristol in 1996. “But they didn’t want the old-fashioned floor plans, where the rooms are tiny and the space is cut up. They wanted big open spaces inside. My work has grown from there, and I’d describe my own house more as a testing ground than a complete statement. It’s where we try stuff.”

On the first floor, the 1999 addition includes a sunny living room, a dining area, a laundry room and

a half-bath. The new portion wraps seamlessly around the original home, a rectangular space that measures about 20 by 40 feet. The original section is now devoted to an art and playroom for their son (Matthew, age eight), a home office for Andrew, and an updated kitchen and adjacent sitting area with a woodstove.

The 1999 expansion also included a stairway to a new second floor, with three bedrooms, and a third-floor tower that the family uses as an exercise

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Above: Heaton and her husband updated the kitchen with skylights, new cabinets and countertops, and an island with a four-inch maple surface. **Right:** Stainless steel handrails and cables add a contemporary element to the staircase. The wood floors at right are Vermont brown maple; the stairs and trim are native ash.



room. From upstairs, the views are awesome: The house sits in a four-acre meadow on 20 acres of mature forest, with 100 acres of town forest directly to the north. A network of trails, for hiking and cross-country skiing, winds through the forest. The property also has a small manmade pond for summertime swimming, three kinds of berry bushes (blueberry, blackberry and raspberry) and lots of gardens; Matthew has taken over the vegetable plot. An outdoor porch with a pergola roof is the family's favorite place to hang out in summer; it's outfitted with Adirondack chairs and decorated with honeysuckle and wildflowers.

"We've been picking away at the landscaping, summer after summer," says Heaton. Last year's project was

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Heaton combines elements of old and new, like these stainless stair rails near a salvaged door with antique hardware. The master bedroom is at left; the sliding door leads to the tower.



Heaton at home with husband Andrew Furtch, son Matthew and Ari the German shepherd.

Just the facts

Joan Heaton specializes in Vermont architecture but has completed projects throughout New England. Her focus is sustainable design and green building, and her signature style is best described as New Vernacular—traditional forms with contemporary interiors.

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a stone patio by mason Dave Brett of Colby Hill Landscape Company. Heaton also works on the landscape design with Megan Moffroid of Broadleaf Landscape Architecture in Waitsfield.

Heaton and her family spend a lot of time outdoors, and their lifestyle is laidback—no surprise, since she’s spent most of her life in Vermont. Her family moved to the Mad River Valley when she was three years old, and she graduated from Phillips Academy in Andover in 1985. She earned her architecture degree at Cornell University in 1990, worked for a few years in Rome, and returned to Vermont for good in 1992.

“This house really suits us,” says Heaton. “It’s informal, with plenty of room for everyone to roam, yet nice intimate places—the living room, the kitchen, the porch—where we gather as a family. Over the years, it’s gone from being a work of architecture to a backdrop for our family life.”

Kathleen James is editor of Vermont Magazine. She lives in a renovated 1856 farmhouse in Manchester Center and writes “At Home in Vermont” in every issue of this publication.