

Dream Home

AT HOME IN THE HILLS



credit

A wide-angle photograph of a winter landscape. In the foreground, a snow-covered field is dotted with several small, bare birch trees. To the left, a portion of a dark green barn-like building with a white roof is visible. In the background, a range of mountains is partially obscured by low-hanging clouds and mist. The sky is overcast and grey.

HOW A COUPLE FROM NEW YORK PULLED TOGETHER DESIGNERS FROM VERMONT
AND AROUND THE COUNTRY TO CREATE A MODERN TAKE ON THE CLASSIC BARN.
BY LISA LYNN | PHOTOS BY GLENN ALLSOP

Simple, barn-like shapes, a palette drawn from the rocks and trees and minimalist landscaping of birches and grasses by Wagner Hodgson helped make this home, finished in 2022, feel as if it anchors this high meadow to the mountains.



HIGH ON A HILLSIDE, WITH VIEWS TOWARD THE WORCESTER RANGE

sits what at first glance looks to be a simple home. It is not too large – a bit over 4,200 square feet. It is not fussy or showy. In a starkly Yankee way, it anchors the end of a field to the mountainside beyond.

This is the home that a couple from the New York area dreamed of. To build it, they pulled together ideas they'd been harboring for years and handpicked the team --- architect, builders and designers--who contributed from as far as Long Island and Los Angeles.

Yet the house they built with its wood beams and stone floors, and its palette of earth tones drawn from the granite and hemlock of the surrounding hills, feels rooted in Vermont.

The couple, who asked to be called by their first names, Zach and Jen, bought 30 acres high on a hillside with views to Jay Peak, well before the pandemic. It was 2018 and they were living in New York. Zach had been coming to Vermont to ski for more than a dozen years.

"We'd been living in 300- to 500 -square-foot apartments and envisioned eventually building something that might be just a vacation home," Zach recalls. "Our realtor, Judy Foregger of Pall Spera, originally sent us listings in Stowe but we really wanted to be in Waterbury for its restaurants and its village and its nearness to the airport. Then she showed us this property." They mulled it over and



The kitchen island looks out to the living area and the steel-clad fireplace.

after a time, made an offer.

Zach had been envisioning his dream vacation home for some time. “Somewhere in the basement I have files of magazine articles, photos and clippings that I’ve been saving since 2008,” he says. Zach’s background as a restaurateur, as well as business experience in real estate development and glass manufacturing, also fed into his design aesthetic.

He even knew what artwork he would hang on the walls. He’d been visiting a Santa Fe, N.M. gallery that his mother first introduced him when he was 21 that showcased renowned Native American artist Poteet Victory.

“I would visit the gallery every few years, but I couldn’t afford Poteet’s work. I hoped that someday I would.” In addition to Victory’s artwork, on his wish list for a dream home were a cellar and humidor for his favorite wine and cigars, a movie screening room and a shower for his Giant Schnauzer.

“We had planned to build in 2019, but we could not get New York banks to see the vision so went with a local bank (NEFCU). It took a year for us to get that straightened out. But that was a good thing because our aesthetic for the house totally changed. I’m glad we waited,” he says.

By then, the couple had sold off all but 10 acres, which included the vast meadow. They had also lined up friends to help work on the house. A buddy, John D’Anna, ran Copperdog Construction out of Shelburne. Another friend of a friend, the architect/designer Amee Allsop of East Hampton, N.Y. helped with the interior design. Zach and Jen had already lined up noted Vermont architect Joan Heaton to draw the lines of the home.

INSPIRED BY BARNS

Heaton had grown up in Warren, not far from the home site. “I started to think about what a contemporary Vermont barn might look

like for someone coming from New York and how can we play that up,” she recalls. “One thing that made it easy is that it’s appropriate in a barn to have these big openings. That allowed us to do the big square windows that maximize the views and the high ceilings.”

It also allowed Heaton to create two main structures – both rectangular – and join them. To the south, the kitchen and living room have their own wing, with a door extending to a covered porch. (The porch was added in fall of 2023, after these photos were taken). Zach’s office sits above the kitchen, in an open loft that looks out over the living room.



Wood beams and paneled walls and ceilings; soapstone surfaces and stone finishes are used throughout the home, tying it to the landscape. The wine cellar, below, was designed by Jason Atkins, who also designed a wine shop for the owner in Brooklyn. “I searched all over to find just the right wine crates to finish the look,” says Zach, the homeowner.





“We wanted a warm, moody kitchen to contrast with light walls used in the rest of the house,” noted designer Jason Atkins. The kitchen has Vermont Soapstone counters and Cle New California tiles in bracken and British Standard Cabinets by Plain English. Across the bridge that connects the two wings a painting by Poteet Victory is visible.

To the north, the “sleeping” wing, as Heaton calls it, includes two bedrooms and two baths on the ground floor and a giant suite on the top floor (a 22-foot by 36-foot space) with vaulted ceilings.

Linking the two is the entryway and stairs, which face giant glass windows, and a second-floor bridge that connects Zach’s study to the owners’ suite. To the north side, a small mudroom is outfitted with a soapstone sink and even a shower designed just to give their Giant Schnauzer a good wash-down.

The stairwell also leads down to the basement level where, wait for it, Zach got his wine cellar, humidor, home theater and even a bunkroom that sleeps four.

Heaton’s plans were originally going to be built by D’Anna’s firm Copperdog Construction. But D’Anna suggested partnering with Bensonwood to do the exterior build. The New Hampshire firm has created buildings such as Rumble’s Bistro at Sugarbush’s Lincoln Peak and Burr & Burton Academy’s Mountain Campus in Peru, Vt.

“Bensonwood ended up being a great solution,” Zach says of the design/build firm that’s dedicated to high efficiency building, and has a special focus on timber frame construction. “We design and build many of our projects here at our facility in New Hampshire,” explains Bensonwood’s Jonathan Wright, who helped complete the project.

“That allows us to do the millwork here, put in the R-35 insulation

A small dining alcove off the kitchen was designed by Allsop and Atkins and custom built by Snowfield to match the cabinets. Below: The main bedroom has an open floor plan that features twin soapstone sinks, a massive tub and a large walk-in closet.

and even fit the Marvin windows into the panels. Then the whole panels — interior and exterior walls, the stairs and even the bridge, were delivered on-site. Once everything is finished in our shop — which can take about 6 months — we can typically build a home on-site in as little as three weeks.” The firm also works with outside designers and does highly customized projects.

As a result, Zach and Jen’s home went up faster than they might have anticipated: like a barn raising, it took just over a few weeks for the walls and structure to come together. “We also planned to be able to add things on later, like the porch which is going in now,” says Wright.

Bensonwood’s Douglas fir timbers were exposed throughout the interior and finished with Vermont Natural Coatings. Their staircase was white oak. After the house was framed, Zach brought in Rob Hunt of Snowfield Woodworking in Morrisville to do the finish carpentry, including the built-in benches and drawers in the kitchen and the 4-foot by 8-foot island of white oak in the kitchen, topped with Vermont Butcher Block.

MAKING IT HOME

The vision was all coming together — perhaps not as originally planned but in an evolutionary way. As the project progressed, Allsop, pregnant with her second child, found she could only devote so much time to the project. Zach called in another favorite designer, Jason Atkins who had helped him design his Brooklyn, N.Y., wine shop, Spirit Animal.

“I was living in California at the time but I knew Zach and I wanted to capture the landscape and materiality of Vermont,” Atkins said. Working with Zach, Atkins came up with the contrast of the darker materials used in the kitchen to create a moody atmosphere and the light airiness of the other rooms. Both Allsop and Atkins worked remotely and never saw the home while doing the work.

In the meantime, the couple’s lease on their apartment in New York came up. “Rather than look for a new place there, we just decided to move,” Zach recalls. “One day in 2022 we found ourselves pulling up the driveway and realizing this was our new home. There was a moment or two of panic. I was thinking this was either the worst decision of my life or the best,” he says. “It was the best.”

Now, on Monday mornings Zach joins a group of buddies to ski Mad River Glen. His year-old Giant Schnauzer, Faust comes romping in from a snowy day to his own shower, set in a mudroom that features Vermont soapstone counters and a custom sink. A fire roars in the fireplace, whose black steel casing rises 28 feet to the living room’s cathedral ceiling. Several paintings by Poteet Victory hang on the walls.

The couple work from home now — Zach in his loft office over the ceiling, Jen in on one of the downstairs rooms. They take time to walk the meadow, to sit out by the firepit that Wagner Hodgson created near a boulder at the far end of the field, and to take Faust for walks.

The humidor and the wine cellar get used for entertaining, and over holidays, extended family settle into the bunks in the screening room.

“Soon, that will be used more by family,” Zach anticipates. He and Jen are expecting a child soon. What started as a vacation spot, is now truly their home. ■

