

FOREVER HOME

Design incorporates sweeping views of Camels Hump, Greens



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PHOTOGRAPHS: ryan bent

"It was time to retire, sort of," the wife of a Waterbury Center homeowning couple says. "We'd raised a family and lived in cities like Boston and Washington, D.C. Now we were empty nesters and began talking about looking for our 'forever' home."

She pauses, smiles, and adds, "It was time for us to kick back and do our own thing."

So, when close, longtime friends told them they were moving to Vermont, the couple started to investigate.

Their friends settled near Waterbury and the couple—she's an artist and he's a semi-retired business consultant—visited and were intrigued.

"We soon fell in love with the area," she says. They looked at numerous homes and lots in the region for almost a year until they finally found a 12-acre, 1,500-foot-high hillside lot near Waterbury featuring drop-



dead views that extended from the Worcester Range to Camels Hump and beyond. "The views seemed to

go on forever," says the husband. "The minute we saw them we both knew we had found our 'forever' home."

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STOWE-BASED MILFORD CUSHMAN designed this contemporary mountain home to take full advantage of its expansive southerly views of Camels Hump and the spine of the Green Mountains while also ensuring that the two-story, 5,000-square-foot home would appear to be nestled into its 12-acre wooded, hillside lot.

SITE SPECIFIC



TO HELP BREAK UP the mass of the home, the design team employed an artful combination of shed and gabled roofs that give the home a look that is both contemporary and traditional.

An expansive deck off the main floor allows the owners and guests to fully appreciate the home's nearby and distant views.



CLEAN LINES



A SMALL BRIDGE provides a novel entryway to the home and also offers visitors, says designer Milford Cushman, “an intriguing sense of arrival, transition, and even journey.”

An exterior steel and wooden spiral staircase links the second floor deck to the ground floor garden and patio.



GREAT ROOM



THE GREAT ROOM'S 22-foot-high ceiling features structural timber trusses with metal tie rods and the room itself is filled with light thanks to a series of floor-to-ceiling triple-pane windows that help, as the owner explains, "bring the outside in."



KITCHEN SCAPE

THE HOME'S EXPANSIVE kitchen features two islands: one is designated as a working island and the other for entertaining.

The kitchen cabinets were constructed by Simpson Cabinetry and the lighting is by Hubbardton Forge.

The open-plan, oak-floored great room is broken into three functional areas—living, dining, and kitchen—and features low-rise furniture to preserve the room's panoramic views.



INSIDE OUT



FRAMED WITH DOUGLAS FIR,
the spacious screened-in porch is located
off the great room and offers a three-season
“get-away” area.



BEAUTY REST



THE MASTER BEDROOM,
with window seat, and a ground-floor
guest bedroom, right, feature expansive
triple-paned windows that artfully and subtly
frame the home's outdoor surroundings.

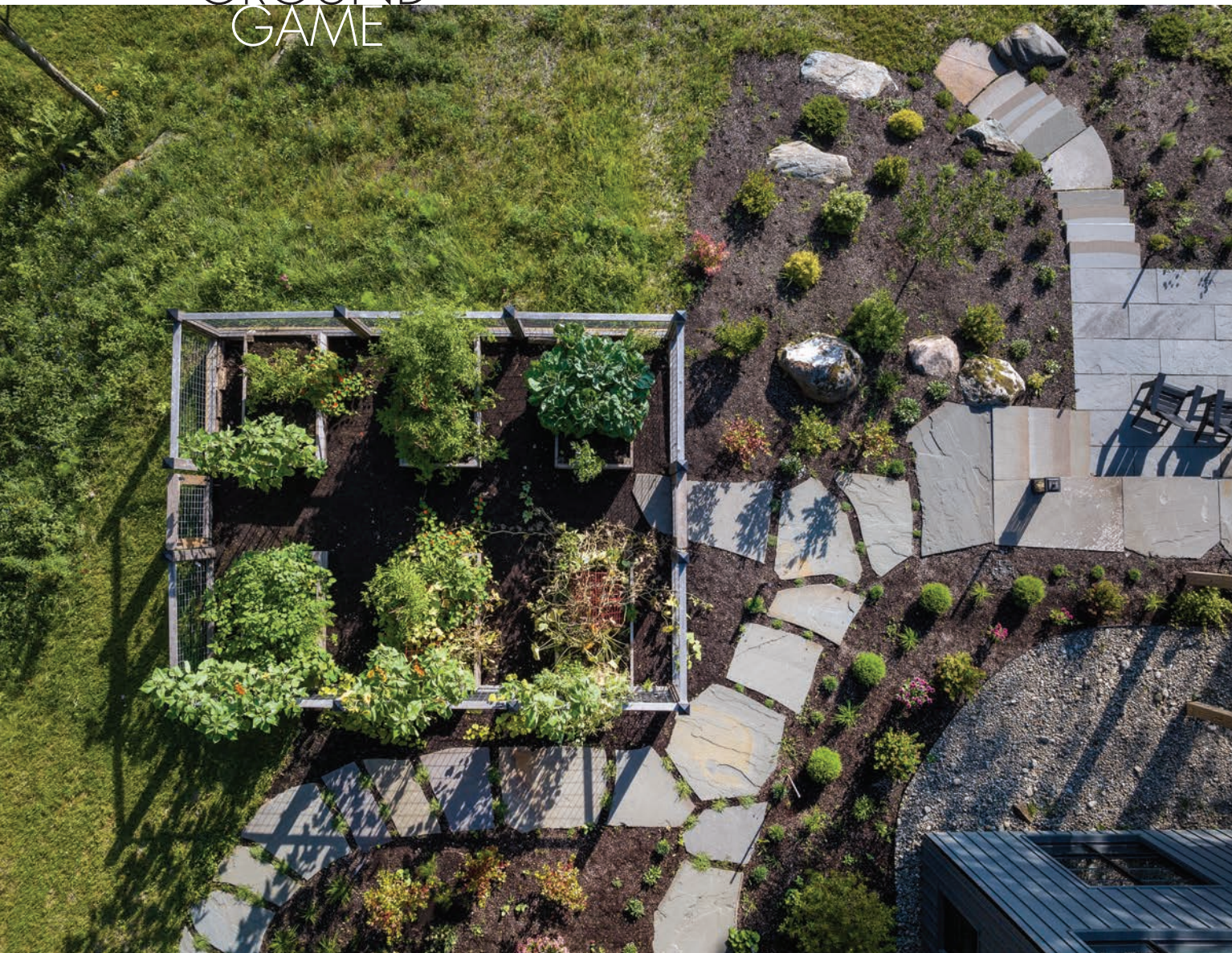


WATER CLOSET



BATHROOMS throughout the home, like the rest of the residence, feature simple, geometrical lines and natural finishes such as marble and wood.

GROUND GAME



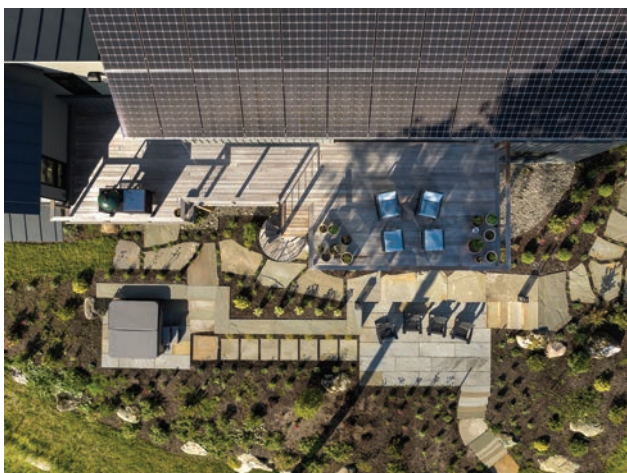
A FENCED-IN VEGETABLE garden protects the owner's plantings from hungry deer and other wildlife. The vegetable garden was positioned on a plateau below the screened-in porch to make it an easily accessible part of the outdoor living space.

Ian Ambler's landscaping team designed a network of inviting outdoor spaces that include a firepit, hot tub, and comfortable seating areas, connected by a series of stone pathways. "To help lessen the visual impact of the spa, we kept the hot tub and patio areas as close to the house as possible," Ambler says.

To encourage edible landscapes, Ambler and his team planted blueberry bushes along the path and grapevines on garden fence posts. Below the vegetable garden is a patch of raspberry bushes on the way to a small apple orchard.

Ambler blended the rectangular features of the house with the same rectangular forms in patio terraces and wall, and the irregular step stone path reflects the natural flow of the native landscape.

The spiral staircase was integrated into the design as a low impact way to descend from the deck above to the landscape below.



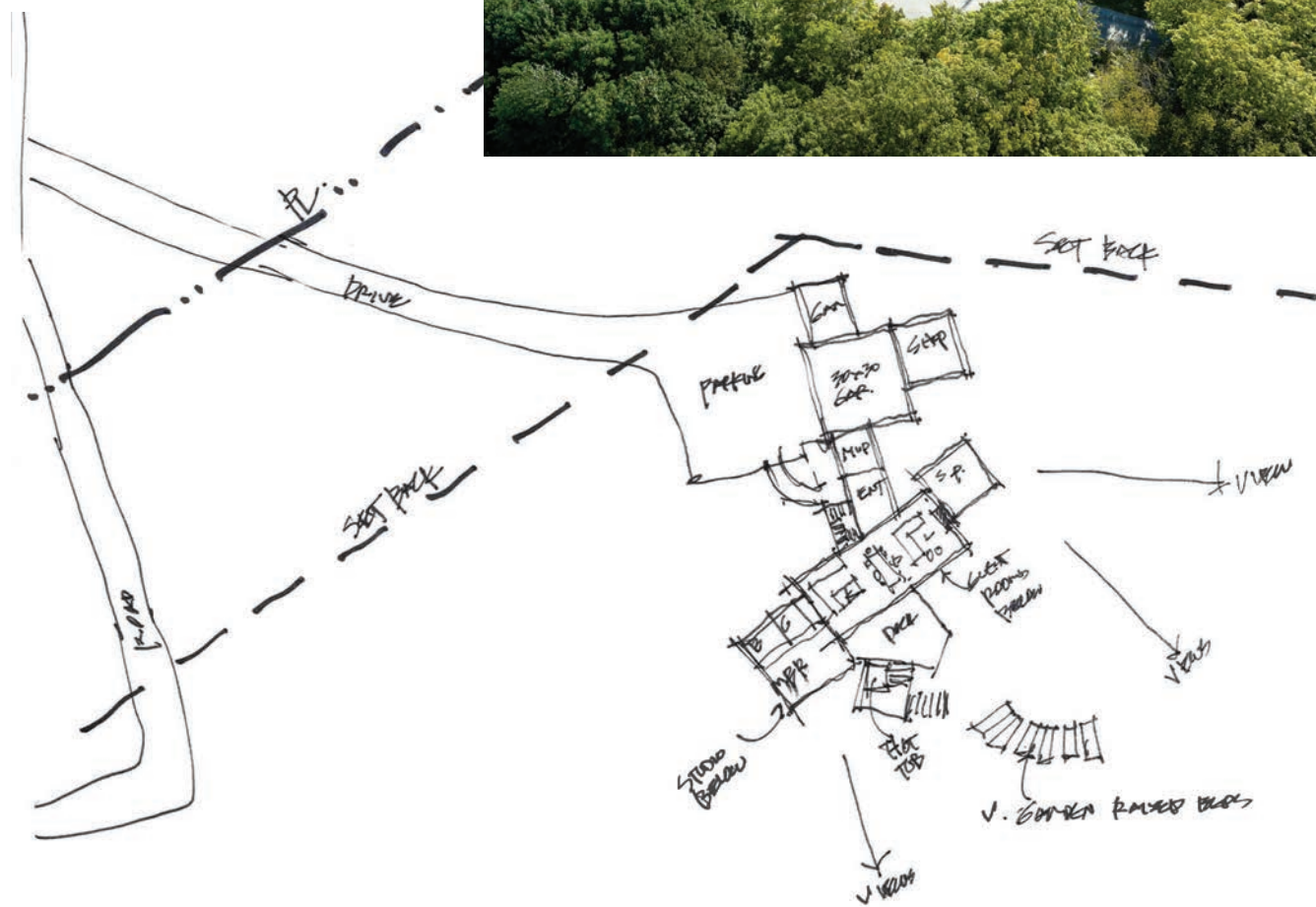
THE FIRST STEP, THE FIRST SKETCH

As Milford Cushman, who has done more than a thousand of these pencil-on-paper rough sketches for clients, explains, “The sketch becomes the first gentle step toward a project becoming tangible.”

What is amazing about this sketch—this first gentle step—is that while Cushman only roughed it out when he first visited the hillside lot, it is remarkably similar—little changed—to the finished outline of the house.

That’s unusual. Most initial designs are merely first drafts that get changed and changed again during the design process. But there seems to be some, what, inspiration in this first rendering?

“Inspiration is a good word. I don’t know but I’ve found that some of my most passionate work comes from somewhere deep within,” he says. “I’m not sure. I don’t know exactly how to describe it. But sometimes I feel my job is to be like a dowser and help clients find out, or locate, what they want.”



AN OAK AND METAL staircase was supplied by Hyde Park’s Custom Metal Fabricators.

The couple met with architectural designer Milford Cushman and detailed their wish list: a two-story home with one level for them and another separate level for visiting children and guests, a large open-plan living, dining and, kitchen area, a porch, a three-car garage, solar panels and—most important—big windows.

“Lots of them,” says the wife. “We wanted to take full advantage of these unbelievable views.”

Cushman, who’s designed more than 1,200 projects during his long design career, visited the lot and was also smitten with both the view and the setting.

“This was one of those special, even ‘sacred,’ locations,” he says. “Almost immediately I sensed the way the home could fit, or nestle, into the hillside landscape and take full advantage of the incredible views. I got out my pencil and paper and began sketching.” (See sidebar, “The first step, the first sketch,” on page 208)

After the couple suggested a few changes to Cushman’s original plan, veteran Stowe builder John Steel and his team broke ground a few months later during the height of the COVID-19 crisis. Steel winces a bit as he recalls struggling with the pandemic, the rising prices of materials, and the shortage of workers at the time his crew began work.

“But we came up with a novel, money-saving idea of using palletized, or pre-built, framed walls, instead of doing regular stick-built construction,” he explains.

He shares a video of the construction and explains how, by using the pre-built walls lowered into place by a crane, framing of the entire 2,000-square-foot first floor of the house was assembled in just one day.

“There were so many challenges to building on this steep hillside site in the winter but we were lucky to work everything out,” Steel says.

Thanks to efficiencies by Steel and the rest of the suppliers, including Ian Ambler’s landscaping team, the home was finished a bit less than a year from the time Cushman visited the site and made his inspired sketch.

The owners came up several times during the building process but report that the first time they walked into their finished home they were “stunned” by the finished product. “Milford and John gave us the home we had dreamed of,” the wife says. “The design takes full advantage of the views and is perfectly compatible with the landscape. Nothing detracts from the view, and everything feels like it was designed to complement the surroundings.”

Adds Cushman: “That’s because it was. We were careful to not compete with the exterior views and also made sure the home itself, espe-



cially when it was viewed from afar, would blend into the landscape.”

The design team even chose gray-stained eastern white pine exterior siding to help the home “disappear” into the lot’s forested hillside.

The home is large, over 5,000 square feet, and Cushman worked to break down the mass of the structure by using a combination of shed roofs, which reflect a mid-century modern aesthetic, and gabled roofs, that evoke a more traditional, even Vermont vernacular.

“This blending of traditional and contemporary—pitched roofs and shed roofs—helps make the home seem smaller than it is,” Cushman says.

Inside, the top floor is dominated by an open-plan great room that includes living, dining, and kitchen and bar areas; all share the expansive distant mountain views courtesy of a wall of windows. There’s also a master suite with bathroom and the wife’s art studio on the main floor.

The ground floor includes a gym, an office, and three ensuite guest bedrooms.

“Because this is our ‘forever’ house, we are essentially living on one floor,” the wife says. “When we have guests, they have their own

floor. It is perfect.”

Now that the home he envisioned has been designed, built, finished and lived in, how does Cushman describe it?

“It’s a celebration,” he says. “It is part of the landscape. It is connected. It works.” ■

ROLL THE CREDITS

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Cushman Design Group

BUILDER:

John Steel
Steel Construction

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT:

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