

A New Face for

An architect applies a modern mountain vibe



Early in my career, I worked in Montana for firms that designed mountainside estates and ski chalets with a rustic air typical of Western architecture. Eventually, Montana's vast, uncluttered landscapes inspired in me a desire to explore a more contemporary interpretation. Rather than create ornate objects on these landscapes, I began to focus on simple forms and durable materials—homes with large windows and free-flowing interiors that, for me, captured the natural grandeur of the West. With this as my mission, I opened my own practice in residential design and construction management with a contemporary spirit.

I retained that sensibility when, with the birth of our first daughter, my wife and I decided to move east, closer to our families. We chose the village of Stowe, Vt., for its tight-knit community and the

mountain lifestyle we'd become accustomed to. Our goal was to buy a modest home that we could remodel into something truly our own.

We purchased an 1800-sq.-ft. Cape in the heart of the town that offered a great location near the mountains, a bike path, and village amenities. The house itself, however, left much to be desired. The traditional floor plan consisted of small, closed-off rooms with tiny hallways, a tight kitchen, and outdated finishes—both inside and out. Nonetheless, we saw potential. We decided to remodel the place to emphasize the house's New England charm, adding design elements that matched our own aesthetic and our growing family's needs. By breathing new life into the old structure, we would create a home that expressed our lifestyle but still adhered to its own sense of place.

an Old Cape

to a New England icon

BY BRIAN HAMOR



It did not turn out to be that simple. As we began the demolition, it became apparent just how poorly the house was built. The framing was undersize, and the electrical and plumbing were not up to code. The heating system was outdated and needed to be replaced. Faced with either patching the building back together or increasing the scope of the work, we chose the latter, stripping the building down to the studs and subfloor and rebuilding it. This also gave us an opportunity to make the house more energy efficient, as our first year in the house was met with exorbitant heating bills (see sidebar, p. 53). We added Energy Star standards to our goals and incorporated durable materials that could withstand the harsh northern climate with little maintenance. Although these decisions doubled our budget and added two and a half months to the construction schedule, they also

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A new aesthetic. In remodeling his own home, the author gave a distinctively modern look to his family's traditional Vermont Cape.



DORMERS WITH “FLARE”

The flared trim on the house’s dormers is the number-one feature people ask me about. It looks complex, but it’s really just an extension of the cheek walls to meet the roof overhang. It’s also not new; I’ve seen this detail on the Western agrarian buildings I admire, and it has been used by other designers (although I haven’t seen it on dormers). To create the flare, we extended the cheek-wall sheathing to the edge of the roof overhang. With both the housewrap and the cheek-wall trim in place, we trimmed out the interior of the flare with three 15-in. poplar boards assembled with biscuit joints and coated on all sides with epoxy paint for durability. Set at a 45° angle, the trim pieces enhance the visual effect of the flare.



gave us more flexibility in reworking the floor plan and in remaking the home according to our own spin on the mountain aesthetic.

A new face in the neighborhood

The typical East Coast interpretation of Western design tends toward lodges with lots of stone and soaring fireplaces—similar to the buildings I worked on early in my career. My own expression of Western design, in contrast, is derived from the agrarian and industrial buildings I admired there. Those barns, silos, and mills have simple forms designed and built for a specific purpose, without outside influences or restrictions. Simple yet refined details focus only on what is required. This results in buildings that become part of their place and that respond directly to the climate and to their intended use.

Our vision for our home was to embrace this approach while honoring the architecture of New England. Sculptural elements would add artistry to the facade without losing the Cape vernacular. The most noticeable of these is a detail on the dormers and the front corners of the house that I refer to as a *flare* (see “Dormers with ‘flare,’” left).

For the exterior, we selected fiber-cement clapboards, standing-seam metal roofing, and local poplar wood trim to withstand the harsh weather with very little maintenance. White clapboard siding and multi-lite white windows honor the original Cape. We chose

Marvin Integrity double-pane windows and doors for their contemporary look and fiberglass construction, and because they were more energy efficient than other windows and doors at our price point. This allowed us to strike a balance between an efficient envelope and an interior enhanced with natural light and ventilation.

A modern floor plan that celebrates simplicity

Winters in Vermont are long, which means you spend a lot of time inside. We wanted to create an open floor plan that would let our family be together even when engaged in separate activities but that also would offer a quiet place—in the form of a media room that closes off from the dining room—as a retreat. In order to remove the old load-bearing walls and open up the living space, we cut in a steel beam to support new metal floor joists that bear the weight of the second-floor and roof loads. To maintain a single flat ceiling plane in the main living space, we used a wide beam that was shallow enough to fit within the floor framing that remained after the demolition.

A woodstove in the center of the house provides supplemental heat and is a gathering point. Expanding the kitchen off of the main living



Energy-smart: A tight house on a tight schedule

Hit with heating costs of more than \$6000 in our first six months in the house, we decided to boost the house's efficiency by eliminating as much of the old structure as we could and retrofitting what remained with energy upgrades we could afford.

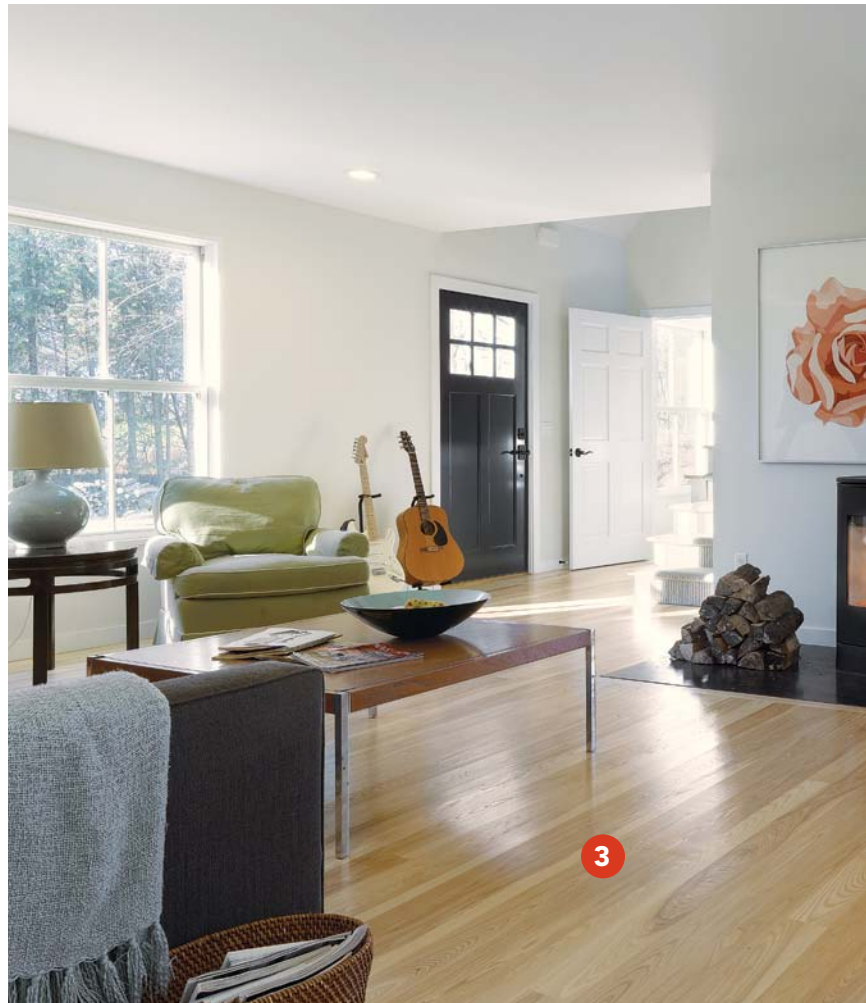
Retaining the original 2x4 wall structure, we added Corbond spray foam to boost R-value and provide an air seal with a vapor barrier. The original Homa-sote sheathing did have some thermal benefits, so rather than remove it, we added an additional layer of sheathing for strength. We installed an HRV and

exhaust-fan timers for controlled ventilation.

Rather than replace the existing oil furnace and hot-air system, we installed radiant-floor heat with multiple zones powered by a 120,000-Btu Rinnai tankless heater. We paired the system with a Morso woodstove for more responsive heating during spring and fall and additional comfort in the winter.

Although our remodel added almost 1000 sq. ft. of heated space to the house, our heating costs have been cut roughly in half. In the summer, the house is also much cooler and better ventilated.

Climate control. The wide-open mudroom features porcelain tile that readily transfers heat from the radiant tubes underneath.

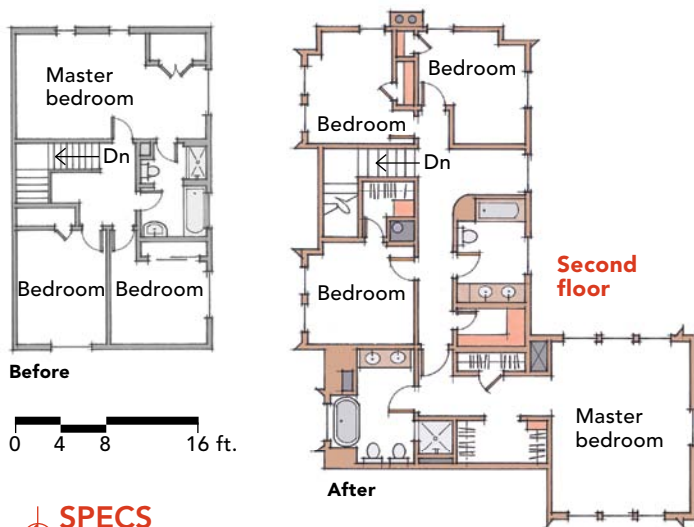
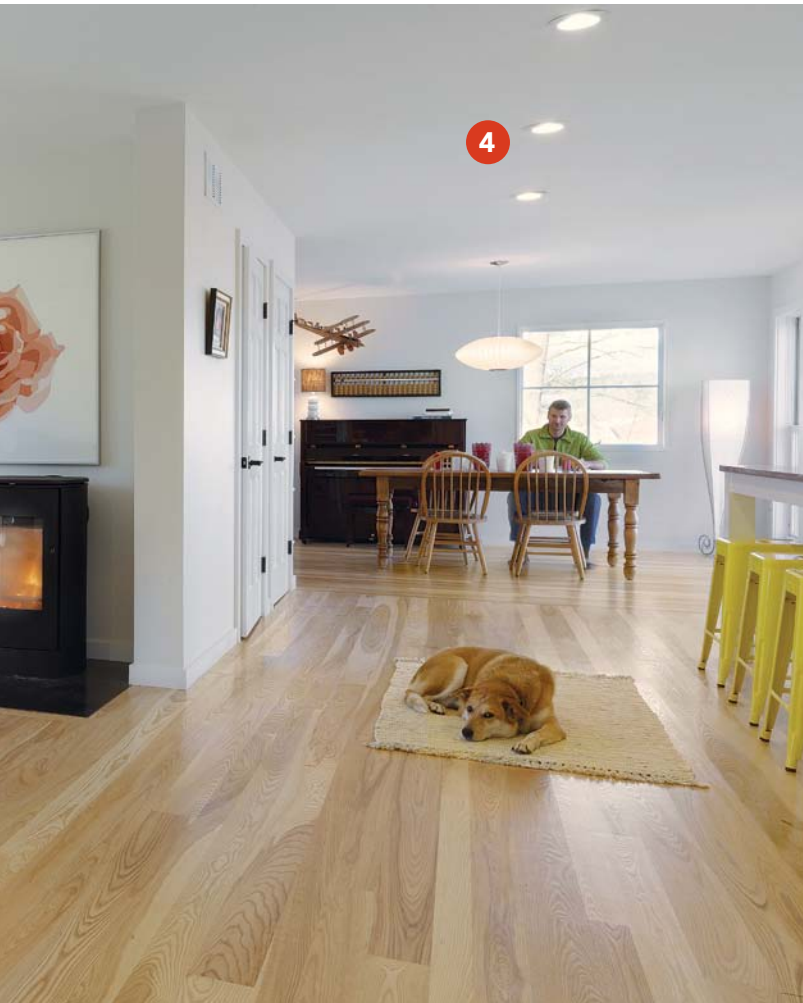


SIMPLE, NO-FUSS DETAILING

With the intention of creating an interior that is calm and uncluttered, we designed the new space with smooth surfaces, a light palette, and refined yet simple trim.

- 1 Large windows flood the interior with daylight and maximize ventilation in the summer months.
- 2 To accentuate the simple rectangular and square window forms, we picture-framed their interiors with minimal 5/4 painted poplar extension jambs that project beyond the drywall about 1/4 in. to 1/2 in., depending on the window.
- 3 Light-colored ash flooring with a water-based finish provides warmth and a neutral background.
- 4 White, flush-mount LED recessed can lights add to the simplicity of the interior ceiling plane.
- 5 Off-white wood, tile, and drywall surfaces reflect, absorb, or bounce light to the interior.
- 6 The absence of wall cabinets in the kitchen accentuates a simple, clutter-free interior. Tile on the north wall of the kitchen helps to reflect natural light into the space.





SPECS

Bedrooms: 3 upstairs, 1 in basement (before); 4 upstairs (after)

Bathrooms: 1½ (before); 2½ (after)

Size: 1980 sq. ft. (before); 2800 sq. ft. (after)

Cost: \$170 per sq. ft. **Completed:** 2013

Location: Stowe, Vt. **Designers:** Andrea and Brian Hamor

Builder: Skyline Building Co., Richmond, Vt.

space and relocating the powder room improved the flow; adding a pantry supplied plenty of storage. On the second floor, we added dormers to the existing house and designed a second-floor master suite in the space between the original house and the garage. The suite includes a large bathroom toward the front, a walk-in closet in the middle, and a bedroom at the back of the house that aligns with the best views. We filled in the space below the master bedroom with a laundry room and a yoga studio where an old three-season porch had been. In front of this, we placed the powder room and added a generous mudroom.

While attending architecture school, I worked in the building trades. Taping and painting high-end homes, I was responsible for the final finish to walls, ceilings, and trim. Out of this experience, I formulated an aesthetic that is simple yet elegant. Overall, my approach is to showcase a home as a whole instead of as a collection of pieces (see “Simple, no-fuss detailing,” facing page).

Stripping away the unnecessary pieces—such as overwrought timber framing or stonework veneer—allows the architecture itself to be revealed and less to become more. It’s not a matter of rejecting embellishment entirely, but reinventing it in a manner that is appropriate to the place and to the people who reside there. □

Brian Hamor (hamorarchitecture.com) practices architecture in Stowe, Vt. Photos by Susan Teare, except where noted.