



AT HOME IN VERMONT

As Seen in VERMONT MAGAZINE

WWW.VERMONTMAGAZINE.COM

Craftsman Cottage

Ned Gaston and Erica Ell built a home by a cascading trout stream that connects the indoors to the out.

Story by Kathleen James
Photography by Carolyn Bates

The dining and library alcove, with views of the waterfall, has built-in window seats and bookshelves (unseen at left). The connecting living room has built-in storage for firewood and a recessed shelf for the TV, covered with a bamboo screen. Changes in ceiling height delineate the living spaces.



continued on page 69

TEN YEARS AGO, Ned Gaston bought a dilapidated hunting camp on 2.5 acres of land in Richmond. It's a beautiful piece of property—forested and rocky, with a 20-foot gorge and the tumbling waterfall of Snipe Ireland Brook. Gaston and his soon-to-be-wife, Erica Ell, set about designing their ideal Craftsman cottage in the woods.

The original hunting camp was beyond repair, but Gaston and Ell didn't want to rent another home while building. So they planned the construction in

two phases, living in the old camp while they built part of the first floor, then moving into the new space while they tore down the camp and built the rest of their new home. "Torrential rains made for a little excitement until the roof was fully constructed," says Erica of their makeshift summer quarters.

Though inconvenient, these logistics were only a minor part of the project. Ned and Erica, who have known each other since high school in New Jersey, shared three inspired goals for their new home. First, they

wanted to respect the natural setting and connect the indoors to the outdoors. Second, they wanted a home of modest size and budget with maximum functionality and flexibility. Third, they decided to use environmentally friendly materials and building techniques.

Ned is a builder: He has worked in carpentry since age 17 and now owns his own residential construction business, Gaston Building + Design. Erica is an interior designer and photo stylist for such home furnishing catalogs as Garnet Hill and LL Bean. When they



continued on page 72

Skylights in a cathedral ceiling and a bank of windows on the southern side make this simple, open kitchen a light and airy space. A walk-in pantry behind the oven wall and concealed appliances help the room to feel uncluttered. Reclaimed wide-plank flooring flows throughout the house, connecting the spaces and lending a warm, casual atmosphere.

Ned and Erica, avid birdwatchers, on the footbridge that leads over the gorge to the house. A wraparound porch, screened porch, deck and patio connect every room on the first floor to the outdoors.



put their ideas and talents together, they devised a 2,700-square-foot retreat that “is healthy and rejuvenating,” says Erica. “It’s a place that makes you feel good...a vacation house for everyday.”

A wooden footbridge leads from the driveway to the house, crossing the deep ravine. The exterior is natural cedar siding, finished and preserved with a plant-oil product. On the first floor, every room is connected to nature by French doors that lead to “transitional spaces,” including a wraparound porch, a screened porch, a deck and a patio. “The house takes in the sights and sounds of the stream and waterfall on one side, and warmth and light from southern exposure on the other,” says Ned. “It’s warm and cozy in winter, and totally open to the outdoors in summer. Every room is filled with a view—green in summer and white, of course, in winter.”

The first floor comprises a mud-room with flagstone floors and radiant heat, a guest bedroom and bath, a shared office for Erica’s and Ned’s



home-based businesses, and an open living space. This central space includes the kitchen, dining and living areas—all visible to each other, yet delineated by alcoves and different ceiling heights. Erica and Ned wanted a simple space, uncluttered yet highly functional, so they added lots of built-in storage and bookshelves, window seats, and a walk-in pantry that minimized the need for kitchen cupboards.

Halfway up the main stairs, a narrow side stair leads to a small sleeping alcove with bookshelves and a futon. On the second floor, an arched hand-planed doorway, salvaged



Natural materials, including flagstone floors and a raw-edged pine countertop, create a warm, tropical feel in the master bathroom. Sandblasted glass shower doors diffuse the southern light. Steps at the left lead to the tub.

Lashed bamboo poles for curtain rods, tropical plants, a hand-carved teak headboard, *tatami* mats and exotic textiles evoke Southeastern Asia and give the master bedroom a vacation atmosphere.



Just the facts

Erica Ell and Ned Gaston designed and built their own home—an environmentally friendly Craftsman-style cottage of modest size and construction budget. For more information, contact Gaston Building + Design, Richmond; (802) 434-6086.

from Shelburne Farms, leads to the master bedroom and bath. The home incorporates many Asian elements; in the master bedroom, for example, the floor is covered with *tatami* mats and *shoji* doors lead to the bath.

The third floor contains a “tower room,” with windows on all sides, that doubles as sleeping space for guests or a meditation room. “Ned’s family likes to congregate here, so we needed as many sleeping spaces as possible,” says Erica.

The flooring throughout the house is reclaimed antique wide-plank spruce. Other salvaged materials include the guest bathtub, a set of atrium doors

from the original hunting camp, a set of Asian hand-carved doors, some recycled lumber in the framing, and the use of the original foundation (built up approximately two feet). Erica and Ned used zero or low-VOC paints, formaldehyde-free cabinets, and citrus-based oil to finish the interior floors and trim. The house is naturally cooled in summer by the central staircase; cool air from the brook flows in the first-floor windows and draws heat from the house as it moves up the stairs and out the third-floor tower. In winter, a high-efficiency woodstove provides warmth, and a high-efficiency boiler provides

hot water for domestic use and the radiant heat in the flagstone floors of the mudroom and master bath.

The house is perfect for Erica and Ned, who love to cook and entertain. “When friends or family visit, everyone can be in the same room,” Erica says of the first floor, “yet the nooks and alcoves allow for different conversations and activities. It’s not a big square room.” They also spend a lot of time outdoors: gardening, hiking and fishing in summer, and skiing and snowshoeing in winter. “We love to enjoy nature,” says Erica. “We wanted to bring that into our home.” 🌿