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A Gathering Place

Like a favorite pair of duck boots, this Vermont getaway is meant to be worn. With friends and kids in tow, a New York couple settles in. ♦ By Molly Walsh

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HE PLOWS ARE OUT AND THE OPAL-COLORED WINTER SKY HOVERS OVER the knobby face of Mt. Mansfield. The dirt road leading to Jennifer and Joe's Cambridge, Vt., house is frozen, providing a good excuse to drive slowly and savor the calm as snow swirls in the woods.

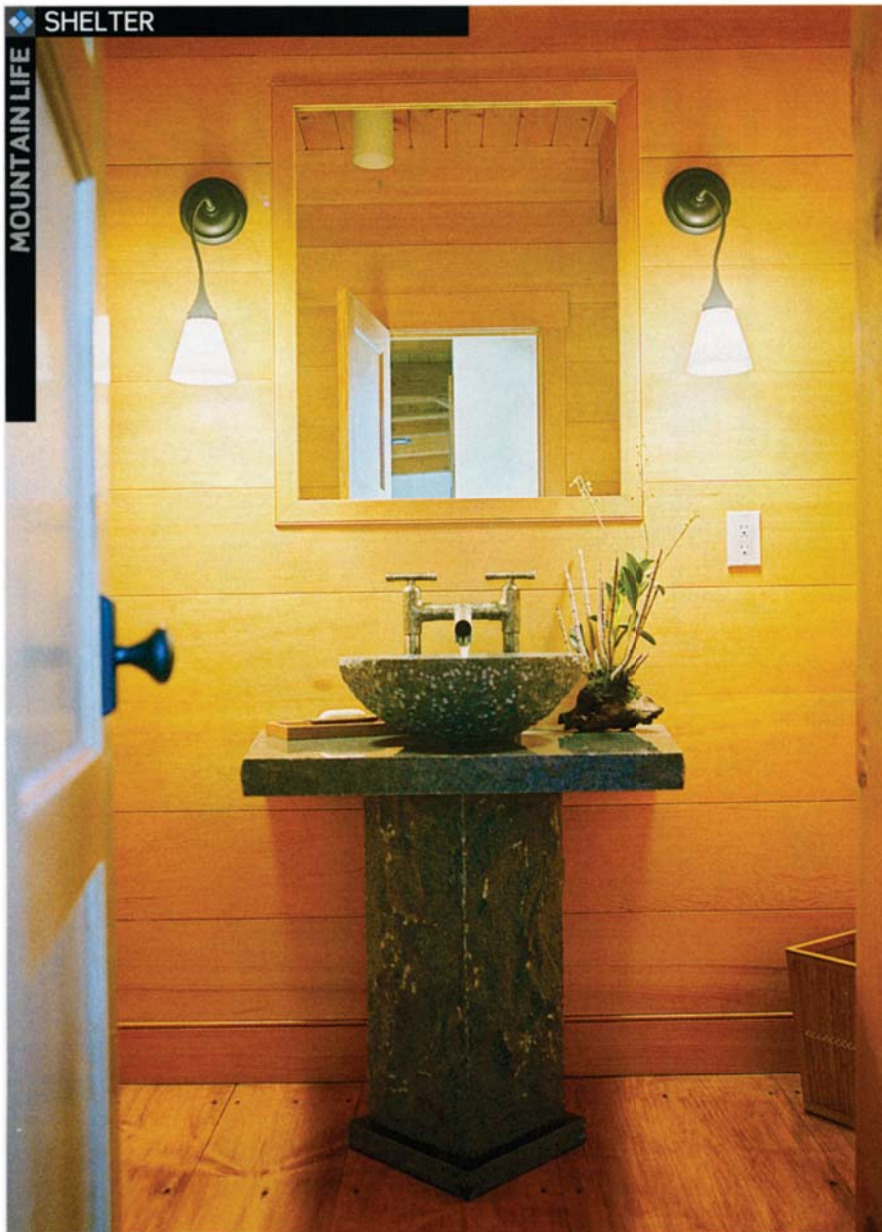
As places go, this slice of rural New England ski country seems as distant in mood to New York City's electric hum as any place could be. And that is the point



Location Cambridge, Vt. **Closest skiing** Smugglers' Notch, 10 minutes away
Square footage 5,540 **Lot size** 50 acres **Architect** Sam Scofield based in Stowe
Building materials The home is timber-frame construction, a 2,000-year-old

method that employs mortise-and-tenon joints—rather than the walls themselves—to support the structure. The result harks back to 19th-century barns, which were predominantly built using this method. **Design strategy** The owners wanted their ski home to be comfortable above all else. To create warmth, they left the wood natural and chose an earth-toned palette.

BLUEPRINT



PAST AND PRESENT The powder room sink marries rough-hewn stone with a modern sensibility, and the faucet is a clever take on a farmhouse garden spigot. The master bath's white pedestal sinks and clawfoot tub offer a decidedly different, airy feel. Previous page: In the kitchen, a granite-topped island ensures the cook will never lack company. Upstairs, the architects used interior windows to open up the smaller bedrooms and narrow hallway into the rest of the home.

for the New York couple (they prefer their last name not be used), who have spent the past two years building and getting to know their Vermont ski house.

The end product is everything they wanted—a carefully crafted, four-bedroom timber-frame house tucked into a spectacular 50-acre parcel just 10 minutes from Smugglers' Notch and 45 minutes from their old college stomping grounds in Burlington. The home's red, barn-style garage, its towering fieldstone fireplace and exposed timbers in the great room,

and its hand-loomed wool rugs and woodcuts by renowned printmaker Sabra Field add up to a place that's nothing like the couple's Colonial back in Westchester County. "This house has so much more character," says Joe. Stowe architect Sam Scofield, who designed the home, describes it as a cross between a farmhouse and a mountain cabin.

Dressed in cords and a chocolate-brown cable knit sweater, Jennifer is pretty but not showy, much like her mountain home. Her husband, Joe, who has been



'I DIDN'T WANT ANYTHING TOO FORMAL, WHERE PEOPLE COULDN'T PUT THEIR FEET UP ON THE COUCH.'

outside tinkering with a set of white lights on an uncooperative conifer, walks into the great room and sits down across from his wife. He wears jeans, a button-down shirt and an energetic expression.

As they sit by the fire, they explain that the house occasionally speaks up. Literally. It makes the loud creaks typical of timber-frame construction as the wood settles. The old architectural style employs no nails, only pegs pounded in with a wooden mallet. Local companies Northwoods Joinery and Peregrine Contracting spent a year building the house, finishing in late 2004.

The great room's frosty windows look out on Mt. Mansfield and the top of the Madonna chair at Smuggs. Two circular chandeliers with beeswax housings custom-made to look like candles hang from the 27-foot vaulted ceiling. A 16-seat Vermont farm table near the windows and a thick Oriental rug by the fire invite guests to stay a while, so long as they follow the house rule stated on a sign near the mantel: "Be nice or leave." The great room is the heart of the house, with the kitchen opening off to one side and a hallway to the master suite on the other.

Stairs lead to three cozy bedrooms upstairs, where Scofield deliberately

designed the knee walls to a height of around five and a half feet, instead of a more standard eight. This helped him pull the pitched roofline down and compensate for the height of the great room, which might otherwise have bloated the scale of the house. "What you don't want is the McMansion feel," Scofield says. The careful design results in a 5,540-square-foot home that feels intimate. "It's small, but it's big," Joe says.

Upstairs, torch-style lights lean out from the hallway walls, and each bedroom is unique, decorated with painted and hardwood pieces, botanical prints and exquisite baskets of nasturtium and eucalyptus. Each of the 4.5 bathrooms is different, too: one with white subway tile, another with blue-green iridescent tile, a claw-foot soaking tub here, a glassed-in steam shower there.

Downstairs, the walls are hand-plastered and tinted a warm yellow to harmonize with the rich hues of the old-growth pine flooring. Working with interior designers from the Burlington architectural firm Truex, Cullins & Partners, the couple reached for a feeling of craftsmanship and comfort. "I didn't want anything too formal, where people couldn't put their feet up on the furniture, couldn't eat on the couch," Jennifer says.

The cedar shingle-clad house has, as its owners hoped, become a popular destination for friends and family. The house has slept as many as 25, for a big family party. Guests filled the beds, daybeds and loft. The overflow slept in the basement's home theater, which boasts a 105-inch high-definition TV and a row of theater-style seats.

Old college friends have gathered, a dozen strong, to fly down the winding

trails at Smuggs and reminisce afterward in the home's outdoor hot tub about their host and hostess's beginnings as a couple, back in the 1970s, at a Burlington pub's 50-cent beer night.

The couple's grown children are also regular visitors. Two sons attend their parent's alma mater, St. Michael's College, just outside of Burlington. On snowy Saturday mornings, they'll stop by with their ski buddies for breakfast en route to the slopes. Sometimes they come for the weekend, bringing their dirty laundry and emptying the fridge.

Jennifer and Joe hope to spend more time themselves at their Vermont house as he steps back from his executive job in New York. Both, though, look too young to be retired, no doubt a result of their active lifestyle. Accordingly, the plan is not to sit around. They have season passes to Smugglers', and occasionally

drive an hour to Stowe, taking the long way because the 20-minute route over the pass is closed in the winter. Joe likes to go fast—but avoids the bumps. "Your knees don't respond the way they did when you were 20," he jokes. Jennifer likes the cruisers. "I'm not a speed demon. I like to take my time." Then back home, they light the fire and admire the pinkish sunsets over their piece of paradise.

From the back veranda, the land runs down to a figure-eight of water—two ponds sealed now with ice. Beyond, evergreens and birches belt the meadow as it rises over broad, white-covered rolls of land and disappears into shadowy green-black forest at the edge of the craggy Green Mountains.

They found the property through a friend in town who said, "You have to come see it." They're very grateful they did. ♦

LIGHTEN UP Wall sconces reminiscent of calla lilies lean out from the hallway walls, which, painted white, brighten the traditional timber-frame architecture. Pitched roofs make the top floor cozy, and create interesting angles and shadows. In the master bedroom, French doors open out onto a patio and hot tub that look onto the home's ponds. The house is situated for maximum privacy—you can look out the windows all the way to the Green Mountains without seeing another property.

