



John Steel (left) president and owner of Steel Construction (builder of the Beechers' house in Stowe) joins the company's site supervisors John Hudgens (center) and Paul Kartluke at the house's floor-to-ceiling fireplace.



Story by Marisa Crumb
Photos by Carolyn Bates

VERMONT HOMES AND GARDENS

Artistry on Every Level

A delightful Stowe house is the epitome of all details considered.

THE CONTENTMENT AND ENTHUSIASM COME through clearly and immediately. Judy and Matt Beecher are without a doubt very pleased with the results of their one-and-a-half-year collaboration with John Steel, owner and president of Steel Construction, also in Stowe, on the couple's gorgeous, custom home. Completed in November 2014, the 6,000-square-foot house sits on eight "amazing acres with views of a beautiful pond," which is what first attracted the Beechers to the property. They then took their time in carefully planning and implementing all that was most important to them in terms of optimum functionality, how spaces were to be used, and aesthetics.

Judy and Matt had a very clear vision of how the house was to be built to best suit their needs and those of their extended family, friends, and guests. And that's where John Steel came in. "John is lovely, warm, and friendly," says Judy. "But most important, he understood exactly what we wanted." Judy goes on to describe how she and her husband each brought different strengths to the vision—and the actualization of that vision—and how that included some very specific requests. "John was willing to do that with us," she recounts gratefully. A self-proclaimed "queen of minutiae," Judy is also quick to admit that sometimes her ideas needed to be reined in. That's when John would say, "that just can't happen!" Judy laughs.

Many, many aspects of their design and plans, however, absolutely did happen...and work successfully and beautifully in the house that majestically looks out over Sugarbush in the distance and closer to their vantage point, Mt. Mansfield and Round Top Mountain. One example of Judy's ideas she insisted on is the placement of not one, but two, laundry rooms—one upstairs for laundry generated on that floor, easily accessible and convenient



The arrangement of the sections of the house was designed to replicate a barn, and the use of stone, wood, and metal, plus glass connectors that link the sections and pay tribute to views outside, make it seem relevant to its surroundings.



Every room and every feature (including the clear acrylic bar stools and 16-and-a-half-foot kitchen island, above) keys into at least one of the owners' goals in terms of both style and practicality...and also keeps nonessential elements in the background.



for all the wet, snowy clothes, boots, and accessories spawned by a day on the ski slopes and one downstairs, with a door to the patio that leads to the pool and doubles as a “summer mudroom.” No family member or guest has to go slogging through the house dripping wet; he or she can toss wet ski clothes directly in the dryer, or bathing suits as the case may be in the summer (of course there are handy hooks for hanging swimsuits and pool towels). Naturally, per Judy’s well-thought-out modus operandi, there are also adjoining bathrooms, because invariably, “once someone is all bundled up head to toe in winter gear, they have to use the bathroom,” Judy sagaciously comments.

Another detail Judy incorporated is the use of recycled, corrugated roofing, creatively used as the backsplash in the laundry rooms. Rescued from a junkyard—discovered by John on a mission and sourced at Mason Brothers in Essex Junction—the galvanized metal certainly makes for a unique design element. Judy and Matt had previously agreed to strive for the integration of local and recycled materials and products. “We really put a



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VISION FROM WITHIN





lot of thought into the design,” explains Judy, “and said ‘think of all the aspects we want to see.’ We also felt like we had the luxury of time and could fully conceptualize our ideas.”

It was crucial to the couple to take into consideration the environment and to maintain a low profile in the bucolic, peaceful setting. The deliberate physical arrangement of the house sections was designed to replicate a barn; the use of stone, wood, and a standing-seam roof also characterize a structure fitting to its Vermont vernacular. To further enhance and respect the surroundings, the couple asked John to link the various sections with glass connectors, which Judy refers to as “truly works of art,” from both an engineering and a construction standpoint. The three glass connectors pay tribute to the stunning views and are a delightful way to traverse the spaces between areas of the home. Building off the property’s topography, one side of the glass passageway is ground level, the other side, a 40-foot drop.

The homeowners wanted a large, comfortable house that would accommodate the needs of extended family and friends no matter what the season or time of day...so, besides spacious bathrooms and sleeping quarters, there is a laundry room adjoining the downstairs entrance and another one upstairs.



The custom components continue in the kitchen, where the 16-and-a-half-foot island plays host to scores of gatherings; family and friends congregate at the center of the action where seven or eight barstools fit comfortably around the curved command center that showcases reclaimed barn boards on the base. Judy relates how the island is perfect for lots of people to gather around, “where everyone gets a job” when prepping for mealtimes. The beautifully patinaed countertop sports two sinks: a farmhouse sink and a chef’s sink, both Vermont soapstone as is the backsplash on the wall behind the oven. They loved the idea of incorporating the local material.

The Beechers chose a zinc countertop, although they hadn’t ever seen that material used before. “I had originally wanted stainless steel,” Judy says. “The biggest concern was installing something precious. Zinc fit the bill perfectly.” As it was explained to her, every imprint and impression would be a permanent history, a stamp so to speak, of kitchen-related




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The barn influence is seen again in not only the décor, but in the high ceilings, wide open spaces, and exposed wooden beams. Seldom Scene Interiors custom-designed the lighting fixtures to work well within the tall, peaked ceilings.

happenings. This aggregate, an account of memories made around the island, is precisely what Judy loves best. The culinary story is a “fabric of family on a countertop,” she quips, “and just keeps getting better.” All the marks, rings, and cuts represent a time and a memory, and will continue to blend together for a tangible collection of family experiences.

Judy shares that she and Matt came up with four key words when envisioning their home: *French*, *industrial*, *barn*, and *nothing precious* (okay, technically, five). They really tried to adhere to these concepts and to not stray from their intentional design. Mission accomplished. Every room, every essential feature, every influence reflects at least one of their goals from their personal style lexicon. Case in point, Judy chose clear acrylic barstools not only for the practical reason that food and crumbs wouldn’t get

caught in crevices or cushions and that they’re easy to clean, but also because she “wanted them to be in the background” she explains—again, “nothing precious.” It’s very important to the couple that their family and friends are comfortable and relaxed.

With highly honed foresight, Judy was adept at asking, “what will this space be used for and what will we do in here?” when planning the different areas of the house. She and Matt purposefully wanted a large home to accommodate extended family and friends, and to make sure they were comfortable when visiting. Asked what style of house she would categorize it as, Judy paused and thoughtfully, slowly answers, “warm...barn...industrial.” She interjects a thought and mentions how very appreciative she and her husband are of the “incredible craftsmanship and artistry that happens.” For in-

stance, she cites the lighting fixtures that nearby Seldom Scene Interiors custom-designed for the somewhat-challenging rooms; with very tall, peaked ceilings, the lighting had to work well spatially in the open-layout areas while still being flattering and practical.

Judy tells the story of the mountain fieldstone, floor-to-ceiling fireplace—enjoyed in two different rooms thanks to its see-through design—and how this feature was yet another illustration of excellent craftsmanship from local artisans. They were absolutely overjoyed with the results, especially the hearthstone. “It’s a beautiful old slab with so many imperfections. Which, in our mind, made it perfect,” Judy relates. “I hugged it!” Her father was a mason, so she has a special affinity for stonework and grew up with the craft. Two sliding barn doors flank either side of the fireplace; the doors lead



into a small, inviting sitting room where many nights the couple and their two daughters can be found curled up in the cozy room enjoying each other's company. Judy and Matt had geothermal radiant heating installed in the engineered oak floors that run throughout the main floor to further increase the warm (literally) feeling.

The Beechers have accomplished their objectives for a comfortable, low-profile, environmentally sensitive home—with the help of John Steel and regional craftspeople—that fully reflects who they are and what they need. The family is also thankful for the vista and the fact that they can enjoy the Stowe area with “range upon range” of mountains, as Judy puts it. The scenery speaks for itself, and Judy instinctively embraced this asset when she designed an entire wall of windows and French doors in the great room because she “wanted the windows to be the artwork.”

Her favorite room? “The kitchen,” Judy decides after giving it some careful thought. “Everyone comes to the kitchen and spends quality time together. It makes me feel so happy!” Artistry + comfort = happiness. 🦋

Marisa Crumb enjoys hiking, kayaking, and life in southern Vermont. Carolyn Bates is a professional photographer who lives and works in Burlington, VT. To see more of her work, visit carolynbates.com.



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