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VERMONT HOMES AND GARDENS

Massages in Montpelier Mix with Mesclun

*Home is where your massage business
and community garden thrive.*

ONE MILE FROM THE INTERSECTION OF ELM AND STATE STREETS IN MONTPELIER'S delightful downtown, an unassuming yet polished midcentury split-level ranch is home to Chris Adams and Sheryl Rapée-Adams' business, Massage Vermont, and also their residence since October 2013. The husband-and-wife team offers relaxing massage therapy; within this bodywork, Chris's expertise is in craniosacral therapy and Sheryl specializes in massage that gently soothes the nervous system, which includes general relaxation massage and foot reflexology.



Both residential and business needs have been met in a deep-energy retrofit and complete redux of this 1961-vintage, 4,100-square-foot, split-level ranch in Montpelier.



Sheryl's treatment room (above) features glass block windows that let in light but still maintain a sense of privacy. The house has been Chris and Sheryl's residence since 2013.

"When we looked for a home to purchase in Montpelier," explains Sheryl, "our bottom-line criteria were that we needed to be able to walk into town and that there could be space for our bodywork business private from the rest of the house. This was the only home available at the time that met our criteria."

Referencing the midcentury ranch design, Sheryl continues, "The style was familiar to me because I grew up in Miami Beach. Midcentury homes were everywhere, so much so that I didn't notice them as a distinct style. In Vermont, though, that was unusual. As renovations began, our contractor, Malcolm Gray, brought us issues of *Atomic Ranch* magazine. Chris and I awoke to the style and its possibilities." While not to-the-letter rigid or adamant about "authentic," she says they "focus first on what's comfortable and beautiful to us, as well as what we can afford. But within that, the midcentury/atomic style has become a comforting, comfortable approach that our eyes and sensibilities gravitate to." The four quasi floors comprise a finished basement; their massage business, which consists of an entrance hall with seating, a three-quarter bathroom, two treatment rooms, a divided area for admin office space, a family room, an expansive sunroom, and a half bathroom; the "main" level with kitchen, living room, and dining room; and the private upstairs that combines the two-room master suite,





Artwork can be found throughout the house, even in the treatment rooms and in the hallways; the homeowners feel very strongly about supporting local artists.

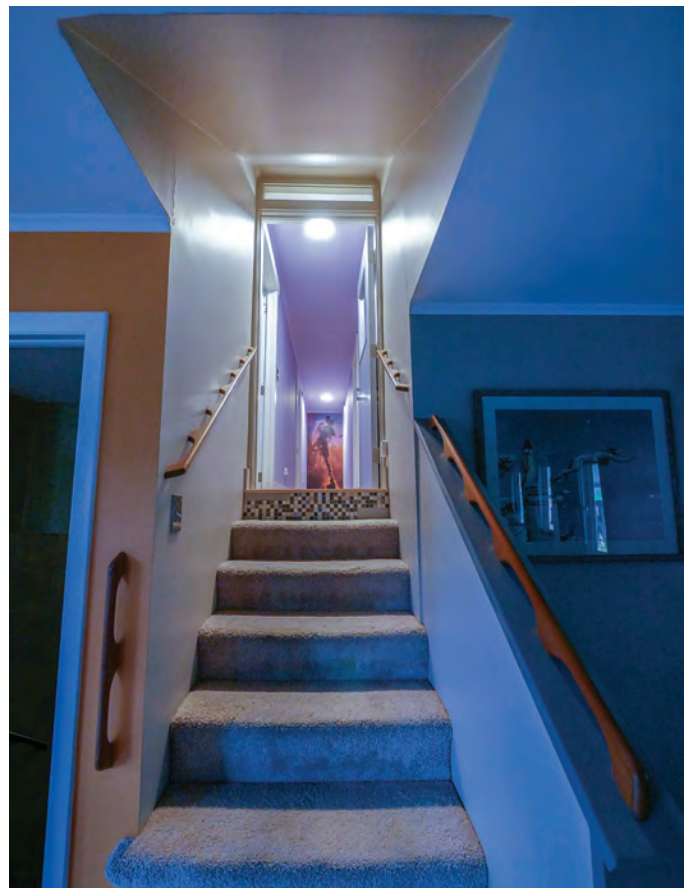


a (gorgeous) three-quarter bath, two guest bedrooms, and a full bathroom. Whew! All this in 4,100 square feet on a tad more than two acres *and* an easy, flat walk to downtown Montpelier. Sounds like the couple met their objective.

Speaking of staying connected to the community, Sheryl and Chris founded a community garden, not tucked in some transformed formerly vacant lot in town—right on their own lawn. Currently 23 households cooperatively manage and produce food, riparian buffer plantings (it's located on the North Branch River), pollinator gardens, and herbs. Dubbed The Garden at 485 Elm, the area is associated with the Vermont Community Garden Network and is a certified volunteer site for UVM's master gardener and master composter programs. The community gardeners work together to endeavor to make fresh, organic food more accessible while also learning from



Contractor Malcolm Gray started replacing floors with maple hardwood soon after Chris and Sheryl bought the house. A wide variety of paint colors and lighting fixtures followed, once major electrical and insulation work was done.



each other by working collaboratively (additionally, the Garden offers interactive workshops), and third, to “grow relationships as well as food,” according to their website. The format also allows the participants the ability to donate fresh food to local organizations and community members in need—a valuable and important model.

In a different sense, collaboration was also integral to making the space inside Sheryl and Chris’s combination home/business a successful investment. Enter Malcolm Gray of Montpelier Construction. The couple’s contractor for the duration of almost a year, the synergistic partnership between the three was amicable and harmonious from the get-go. Malcolm was on the scene shortly after the couple purchased their home almost five years ago and delved in with enthusiasm. He started replacing floors with rustic maple hardwood (and cork in the family room and office area) and working on “preliminary stuff” while concentrating on the extensive, predominant goal of a deep-energy retrofit. The house is now close to net zero, thanks to three wells dug in the backyard that pull heat out of groundwater—a more solid and durable method than air-source heat pumps—and provide elements of passive house standards. The couple was determined to make their home and work environment contain no combustible heating and cooling (they do however have a backup propane generator). Solar photovoltaic panels were also installed on the south-facing side of the house, and a new, standing-seam metal, very low-maintenance roof topped the list of high-performance improvements. Working together for the better part of a year, the work crews from Montpelier Construction “were like our roommates!” laughs Sheryl.

Next up was modifying space to accommodate a second treatment room on the massage office level, which involved building a new wall, adding a second doorway, and soundproofing all the walls. It was then that Malcolm discovered cut, live wires within the walls. As Sheryl wisely comments, “there are always surprises.” Chris chimes in and together they describe how “the biggest one, even though we had an extremely thorough home inspection, was once they started pulling the walls down, the electrician found that the romex [wire]



A three-quarter bathroom with generous use of fine tilework blends all kinds of cool colors and smooth textures together in a utilitarian but very spacious environment.



was rotting. We had to replace all the wiring, switches, and outlets in the *entire* house.” On top of that discovery, when the house was originally built in 1961, Chris explains, it was wired for electric heat, and when they replaced the electric heat with oil in the ’70s, apparently they just cut the wires and left them in the wall (*gasp*!). “They found live, 240 wires in the wall just hanging there.” “So, yeah, that all changed,” adds Sheryl.

Blown-in cellulose insulation that was air-sealed with spray foam first encompasses one end of the house to the other. “It’s sealed up pretty tight,” Chris says. Another renovation included sealing up an existing brick chimney and fireplace. “Knowing we valued energy efficiency and didn’t want any combustibles,” Sheryl elaborates, “the fireplace is now well insulated and sealed up. The chimney remains as an aesthetic feature.” On the inside, in the living room, a custom cherry cabinet designed and built by Malcolm Gray with stained glass inserts by Vermont artist Fred Varney seamlessly conceals the fireplace. An upgrade that was integrated throughout the home and office space top-to-bottom was the replacement of all doors and windows—*everything*, Chris emphasizes—with argon-filled, triple-pane glass. Malcolm notes that the glass is R11 (average is R3), which makes for sound-proof surroundings, and that the insulation in the walls



Colorful paint choices abound within the house: "There's not a single white wall," says Sheryl. "We like crazy colors!" A highlight of the living room is a cherry cabinet that was custom-built by Malcolm Gray, featuring stained glass inserts made by Fred Varney.



is R30 (average is R21). Interestingly, Sheryl's treatment room is interior—no exterior windows, she explains. "Our Montpelier Construction project manager, Harry Strand, suggested glass blocks, which run along the tops of two walls. They allow in light but the room remains very private."

The flat, low ceiling in the much-used, much-loved sunroom was another project Malcolm and his team tackled; they raised the ceiling in the light-filled space and gave it a modified cathedral ceiling that truly opens it up and makes for a comfortable spot to have their morning coffee, read, and enjoy playing with their two resident cats. "Our home is very custom, very personalized," Sheryl remarks. "It's not neutral at all." When asked about the colorful paint choices, she doesn't hesitate. "That was a team effort between Chris and me; we have completely compatible tastes and we like crazy colors!"



There's not a single white wall. They just feel good." Chris isn't arguing at all. Actually, the "purple bathroom," which is anything but boring and banal, is one of his favorite places in their home.

Aligning with their community-oriented mind-set, the couple feels strongly about supporting local artists as well as working with local tradesmen and craftspeople. To the left of the aforementioned custom cabinet in the living room is a portrait of Chris and Sheryl by Vermont artist Peter Huntoon, who is known for his Vermont landscapes. Other local art in and around the couple's home is a painting by Montpelier artist Monica DiGiovanni, and outdoor sculptures include pieces by Montpelier sculptor Ryan Mays and a stainless-steel-and-marble sculpture, *Three Sisters*, by John Matusz of Waitsfield. As for the features the couple get the most requests for "Who did that beautiful work?" That would be the landscaping in



Windows in the family room allow loungers to enjoy the view of landscape artist Mia Rubow's handiwork, as well as that of several outdoor sculptures in Chris and Sheryl's collection.

the front perennial garden—credit goes to landscape artist Mia Rubow—and the plaster on the office and family room interior walls—done by plaster expert Dave Thurston—both from Montpelier.

Community, collaboration, and co-operation. As Malcolm Gray expressed, "They're great people to work with." And as far as his experience with remodeling their home and business, he adds, "I had a lot of fun with it." Referring to every aspect from colors to lighting to upgrades, he asserts, "The house was asking for it...now it sparkles." And guess who is building the new compost shed for the adjacent community garden this summer? **T**

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

JUST THE FACTS

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Roy Refrigeration

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