

Fine Homebuilding  
2016  
HOUSES  
AWARD

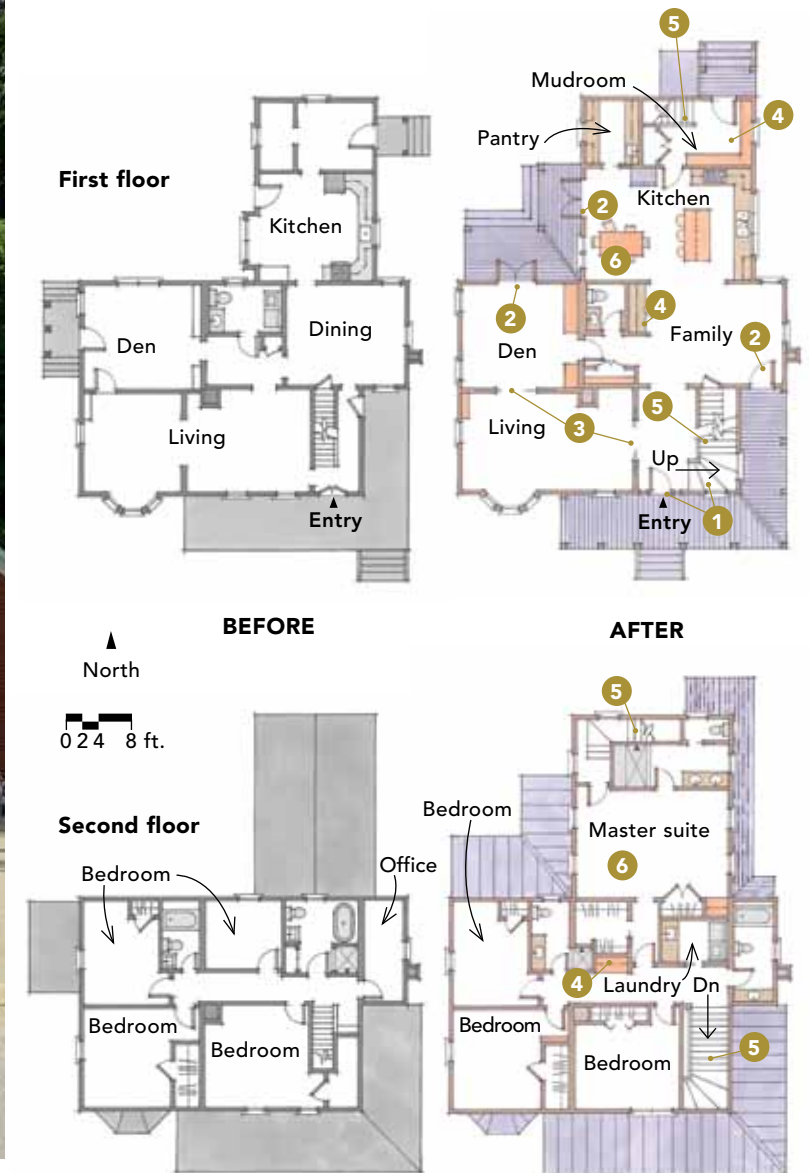
## BEST REMODEL

Our award for best remodel goes to Conner & Buck, a design/build firm in Bristol, Vt. The winning project is an extensive remodel that balances traditional New England character with the openness and light of today's more-modern homes. The family of five that lives here enjoys the resourceful use of every space and the superior craftsmanship that earned the home this honor.



## HOW TO ADD FUNCTION AND FLOW

Here are six ways the new floor plan achieves the goals of longer views, a better flow through the house, purposeful spaces, and a strong connection to the outdoors.



- 1 Views inside a house invite you to explore visually and literally. Moving the stairs and repositioning the front door cleared the way for a view from the entry all the way through the kitchen.
- 2 Views out of a house can create a spacious-feeling interior. Here, French doors in the family room, kitchen, and den offer a connection to the street-facing front porch and the private back porch.
- 3 Doors can add character and distinguish spaces. When open, the pocket doors used here connect spaces and frame views. When closed, the doors create intimate, private rooms.
- 4 Used well, transitional spaces can offer more function to a home. The mudroom, built-in office, and linen closet squeeze in convenience just where they are needed.
- 5 Getting in and out of a house and up and down stairs should be easy and comfortable. Here, two new stairways connect the first and second floors, with easy access to both entries.
- 6 Sometimes a little extra space is needed. Pushing the addition out and up created room for a family-friendly kitchen and a comfortable master suite.

# Craftsmanship & Collaboration

A stunning winder stair is at the heart of a savvy remodel in rural Vermont

BY BRIAN PONTOLILO

When Will and Vanessa Halby relocated from California to Vermont, they were expecting their first child. Needing a place to live, they decided to build a yurt on a remote 300-acre property where they have a family vacation cabin. What was meant to be a transitional period turned into a five-year residence, during which time the family grew, again and again. It was time to find a more suitable home for the family of five.

Will and Vanessa found an 1890s village home that they thought had “great bones.” They appreciated how well it fit its small Vermont town. There were two significant problems, though. The house wasn’t big enough for the family, and although it was charming, it didn’t quite fit

their style. They decided to buy the house anyway, and so began this extensive remodel.

Will and Vanessa hired Chris Conner’s design/build firm, Conner & Buck, for the project. They were familiar with Conner & Buck, who had done work on their family’s cabin and had remodeled this very home 18 years earlier. Yet as much as the couple adores the charm of old New England houses, during their years in California, they had become equally fond of the light colors, flowing floor plans, and outdoor connections of West Coast homes. They decided to ask a California friend, interior designer Annette Tatum, to work on the project as well.

While Conner & Buck is largely responsible for this design, Annette was integral to choosing colors, fixtures,



## CRAFTSMANSHIP IN FOCUS

Open pocket doors between the living room and the entry frame a view of the curved winder stairs with its stout, traditional newel post anchoring the sweeping handrail. The reclaimed pine treads stand out within the framework of the bright-white skirt, risers, and frame-and-panel wainscot. The tight inside radius softens the presence of the extrawide stair.



and finishes, and she helped to translate Vanessa's strong aesthetic ideas for the builders.

The first time Conner & Buck remodeled this house, it was split into a duplex. The work was largely about restoring it to a single-family dwelling and attaching a kitchen-and-mudroom addition. Improved as it was, the house still had two awkward entrances. The front door opened straight in front of the stairs, and a side door dumped visitors into the passageway between the hall and the family room. Will and Vanessa wanted a front entrance with a long view.

The home now has a repositioned front door that opens into a spacious foyer. From here, the view extends all the way to the

mudroom door at the back of the kitchen. Chris also relocated the side door from the hall to the new family room. This connects a commonly used living space to the new front porch and a view to the street.

Getting all of this done called for a significant feat: The main stair had to be moved. Though these changes greatly improved the existing floor plan, Will and Vanessa still wanted additional space for a more functional and social kitchen and for a master suite. Chris found this space by expanding the addition and adding a second story to it. To Will and Vanessa's delight, this didn't change the rooflines or the home's scale as seen from the street.

Not only did Will and Vanessa want to work with Annette because of her aesthetic as a designer, but they have something in common: Annette has a big family, too.

"When you have a bunch of kids in a home," says Annette, "it's worth putting extra attention into the common areas and bedrooms." Fortunately, getting those spaces right on this project meant making only subtle changes, often to the transitional spaces.

Downstairs, for example, double pocket doors now connect the entry, living room, and den, which all kept their existing locations. These new openings allow the flow through the first floor to be uninterrupted when the pocket doors are open. When

closed, these spaces become more private and intimate.

An inside corner in the back of the house proved ideal for a private outdoor space accessed by double French doors in the kitchen and the den, which expand the feeling of spaciousness inside, even when closed.

Because the kitchen now includes a dining area, the dining room became a family room. The laundry was moved upstairs, leaving space for a built-in office outside the kitchen. Keeping with the theme of making the most of transitional spaces, the team included a built-in linen closet in the second-floor hall.

Will, Chris, and Annette agree that much of what you see in this project is the result

# LIGHT, COLOR, AND PURPOSE

In Vermont, exposed timbers are a staple. Rich in color, these timbers ground the room, while other fixtures and finishes add a lighter quality. Over the island are pendant lights with large, clear-glass globes from Regina Andrew. The counters are honed white marble. The backsplash is classic white subway tile, and all of the appliances are stainless steel. Over the table, a copper fixture from Shades of Light brings a more industrial-rustic quality to the space.



## SPECS

- Bedrooms:** 4
- Bathrooms:** 3½
- Size:** original, 2540 sq. ft.; renovated, 3203 sq. ft.
- Completed:** 2015
- Location:** Bristol, Vt.
- Designer/builder:** Conner & Buck, connerandbuck.com
- Interior designer:** Annette Tatum, annettetatum.com

of Vanessa's vision. Vanessa wanted an open stairway as is often found in traditional homes. The talented Conner & Buck crew used this opportunity to create a showpiece. The new stair winds with a radius that bends the first four risers and handrail 90°.

Vanessa also wanted a floor reminiscent of Vermont's country stores. All the flooring is made with reclaimed wood. On the second floor, it's yellow pine. The first floor has heart pine, spruce, and hemlock.

Though the stair and floors are the main focal points, the house is full of character.

Decorative fir beams in the kitchen define the long span of the open space. A Dutch door keeps the family dogs out of the kitchen but keeps the mudroom visible.

Nearly all of the trim in the house is Benjamin Moore Super White, so the Behr Red Pepper used in the den has a great impact. Annette says, "People will gravitate toward that room." She adds that "the color brings something eclectic to a more traditional house." Annette decided to use color in the more functional spaces, too. For the cabinets, she chose Downpipe, a Farrow & Ball color.

The first time Chris remodeled this house, he insulated the walls and attic with cellulose. This time, he added exterior rigid foam to the existing walls to bring thermal performance to R-26. To improve airtightness, he wrapped the house with Blueskin, a self-adhesive air and weather barrier.

The plan for the newly expanded addition was to use 2-in. rigid foam on the exterior and a flash-and-batt system in the walls. The installer sprayed the flash coat too thick, though, so Chris had him fill the cavities, which resulted in R-38 walls. Chris insulated

the vaulted ceilings to R-44 with a flash-and-fill system, and the attic floor of the flat ceilings to R-70 with loose-fill cellulose.

Chris added Daikin Sky Air heat pumps for space heating and cooling on the second floor. The most significant mechanical upgrade, however, was the addition of a Build Equinox CERV energy-recovery ventilator. The CERV supplies fresh air to the house with a heat exchanger and a small heat pump that brings incoming air up to the actual indoor-air temperature. It monitors temperature and humidity and circulates air

accordingly. The CERV detects both CO<sub>2</sub> and VOCs and is controllable with an app.

Annette says that her role on a project is often to translate the homeowners' ideas for the builders and to bring the builders' expertise to the homeowners. "It's so important to trust the builders," says Annette. "The guys on the job every day often know the best answer when there is a decision to be made." She says that this was particularly true in working with Conner & Buck.

Chris has a unique view on this project, having remodeled the same house 18



**The jewel-box effect.** The den is the only room in the house where the trim color is not white. Interior designer Annette Tatum calls this the "jewel-box effect" and says that the rich color will invite people to this room. The double French doors draw in light and draw people out to the back porch.



**Function and charm around every corner.** Making the most of the transition from kitchen to family room, the built-in office has file drawers and closed cabinets for function, and open display shelves to bring charm to what might otherwise be a utilitarian space.