



# TIMELESS, NOT TRENDY

Couple brings a touch of Europe, chalet-style, to Stowe

STORY: robert kiener | OPENER: luke sisler | INTERIORS: glenn callahan



“Timeless,” said the homeowner, when asked

for a word that summed up what she and her husband were looking for in the design

**Previous page:** Stowe-based architect Paul Robert Rousselle helped the owners of this 4,500-square-foot home place it on its site so that it nestles into the gently sloping six-acre lot. Above and right: Inspired by modern European chalet architecture, the home boasts a varied and cantilevered roofline that helps break up the mass of the structure and uses natural materials, such as flagstone and Eastern white cedar siding, to help the home blend in with its forested setting. Almost every room in the home features dramatic slope-side views. This stunning light fixture graces the entrance hall.



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of their new home set high in the hills of Stowe. “We didn’t want trendy, we wanted something classic.” Her husband chimed in: “The last thing we wanted was a home that might look out of date in a decade or so.”

Stowe-based architect Paul Robert Rousselle remembered his preliminary meetings with the couple, who had just purchased a lot with dramatic 180-degree views of Mount Mansfield and its ski slopes. “They wanted a design that was elegant and rich, but at the same time simple, something that would stand the test of time and not become dated. I began thinking of the design as the ‘forever house.’ ”

>> easy living

The owners chose a subdued, neutral design palette so as not to conflict with the home's expansive use of wood, such as the great room's hemlock post-and-beam timbers, white oak floors, and paneled walls. A simply designed, yet elegant sculpture sits on the table behind the sofa.





**A massive fieldstone fireplace anchors** the home's open-plan living room and features a several-ton hearthstone the owners found nearby. The home's modified post-and-beam construction allows the wall of triple-pane windows to fill the great room with light year around. A ringlet design keeps fireplace tools in their place.

## >> room for ten



The dining area of the great room features a custom-made 10-person dining table fashioned from kiln-dried slabs of red elm from Vermont Tree Goods and a modern metal base. A modern, pendant-style light fixture serves as a dramatic focal point.



## >> meal time



In keeping with their desire to keep it simple, the owners asked for open shelving in the kitchen. Because they are both keen cooks, they wanted separate cooking/work stations in the open-plan kitchen, which also includes a small pub table for informal meals.

## >> master class



**The spacious, high-ceilinged master suite**, located on the main floor, features an attached office, a walk-out patio, and master bath. The radiant-floor-heated bathroom includes a freestanding tub, high-performance, custom-designed concrete counters with his-and-her sinks, and a spacious walk-in shower.

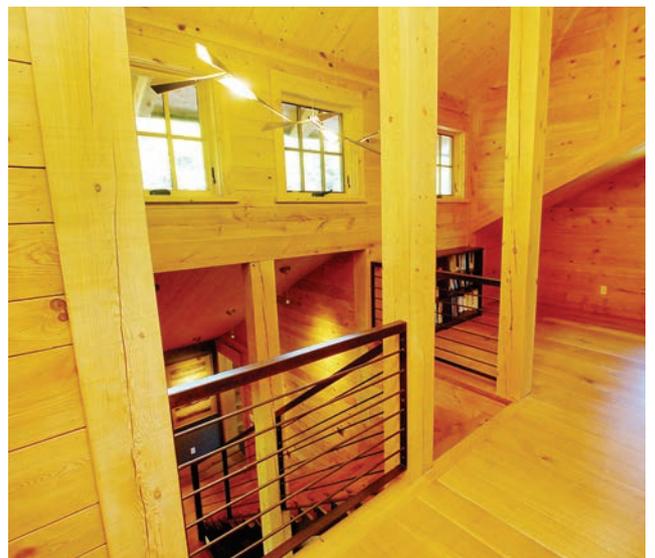
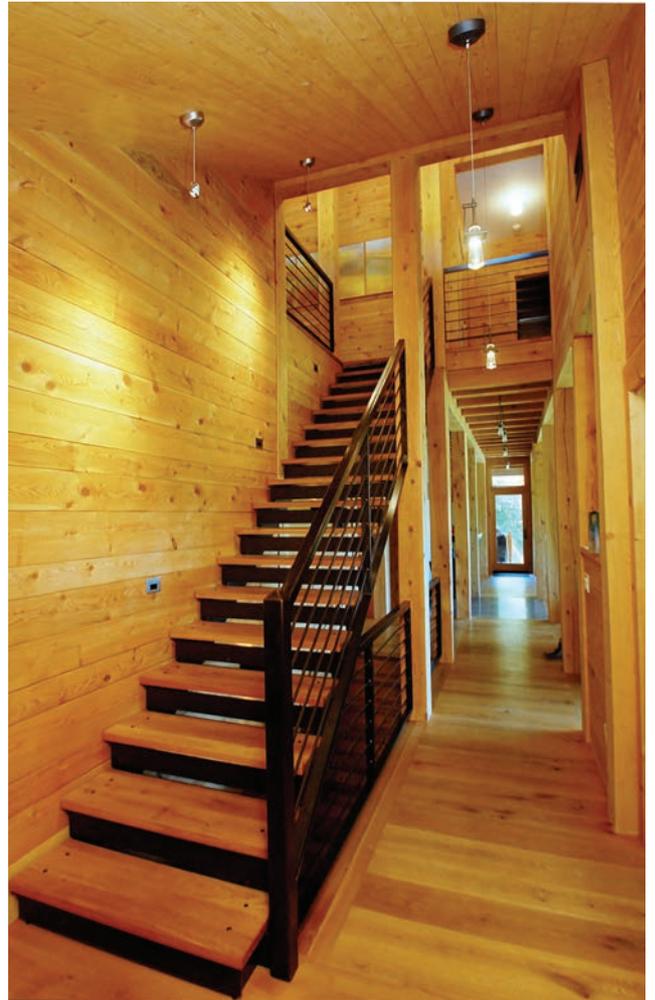


The three children's bedrooms are on the home's second floor and each echoes the modern rustic chalet design of the rest of the house, with lots of wood, minimal furnishings, and great views. One bedroom also features a hideaway loft that comes in handy for sleepovers.

>> porch living



**The screened-in, three-season porch** is angled off the home's main floor and, like most every room in the home, boasts great views of surrounding woodlands as well as Mount Mansfield's historic ski slopes. A sturdy coffee table was fashioned from a piece of glass atop a massive oak slab.



Paul Rousselle designed what he and the owners call "the egg" (top left), a small transition space, to provide a visual break from the hallway that leads to the first-floor master bedroom. Right and below: the metal and wood stairway preserves the home's open plan and lets light flow from floor to floor. Opposite: Insects as art grace the walls of the entrance foyer. The game room.



The couple had long been entranced by the modern chalet-style homes they had seen during frequent travels to France and Switzerland and felt such a traditional, albeit updated look, was perfectly suited to their new six-acre lot and its drop-dead views. When a local designer friend saw the lot, he told them it was perfect for a home in the modern-chalet style.

That helped them seal the deal; chalet it was. “We loved the appearance and feel of modern European chalets that featured lots of natural materials such as wood, stone, and glass, and had simple but elegant lines. And we wanted a home that would take full advantage of our views,” the wife said.

The couple had been collecting numerous modern chalet design books that included homes from around the world. They paged through them with Rousselle at early design meetings, pointing out details they liked—creating a wish list of sorts—as well as design elements they didn’t care for.

“This helped me understand their likes and dislikes, as well as discover the details and minutiae of what make these modern chalet homes so special,” said Rousselle. Eventually, he came up with a 3-story, 4,500 square-foot design that responded as well to the site as the owners’ needs.

Stowe’s Steve Sisler of Sisler Builders was part of the team from the very beginning. From the first day that Rousselle, the owners, and Sisler walked the site, it was obvious that the west-facing house had to withstand the heavy snowfalls and fierce winds that blew down from nearby Mount Mansfield. “The harsh weather was obviously going to be a factor, so designing and building an energy efficient home was paramount,” said Sisler. Early plans included a geothermal heating and cooling system, radiant heating, triple-pane windows, a robust insulation envelope, solar panels, and more.

The couple asked for a plan that included a master bedroom with attached home office, bedrooms for each of their three children on a separate floor, an >>

open-plan living/great room, a porch, and a basement recreation room.

“We also wanted a kitchen that could accommodate both of us cooking at the same time. We didn’t want it to be too ‘kitchen-y,’ but to blend in with the rest of the open plan,” the wife said.

The couple also stressed they wanted to build as environmentally friendly a house as they could. In addition to locally sourced wood and stone, they wanted to use only no-VOC (volatile organic compounds) and low-VOC paint. They hoped to use reclaimed wood for kitchen cabinets and asked that any wood used be treated with a simple oil finish and left slightly rough for a natural appearance.

Said the husband, “We wanted a look that was more rustic than manufactured, a look that was ‘perfectly imperfect.’”

Rousselle describes the design process as a true collaboration between the owners, the builders, and himself. “Everyone had a voice in the design that changed and morphed as the construction progressed,” he said.

“Making changes during the construction phase can be challenging, but it also assures that the owners are getting exactly what they hoped for,” Sisler added.

Fourteen months after breaking ground, the home was completed.

From the moment a visitor drives up to the house it is evident that this collaboration between architect, builder, and owners paid off handsomely. Rousselle’s take on the modern chalet style nestles perfectly into the lot and is anchored to the ground by a flagstone facade.

Eastern white-cedar siding, hemlock architectural brackets, varied roof lines, and expansive windows all evoke modern chalet design. Although the home is 4,500 square-feet, Rousselle has broken down (or disguised) the mass of the house by angling the porch, garage, and master bedroom off the main core of the home, making the three-story home appear much smaller than it is.

Once inside, seven floor-to-ceiling windows frame the mountain and forest views and bring the outside in, bathing the 11-foot-high, open-plan great room in light throughout the year. Rousselle designed a hybrid post-and-beam structure and chose locally-sourced hemlock for the structure’s exposed beams.

Wood is everywhere; in addition to the hemlock post and beams, the floors are constructed from dense, country-quartered and rift-sawn white oak and the walls are paneled with lightly oiled hemlock and spruce.

To break up the horizontal lines of the great room, Rousselle added vertical elements such as pylons and floor-to-ceiling display shelves. The walls are covered with paneling of different widths to add variety and “a sense of surprise” to the home. This random sizing is

another nod to European chalet design, which often features differently sized wood, because wood is often harder to come by there.

“It was challenging to work with wood of different sizes but worth it,” said Sisler. “Details like that help to give the home a classic, yet contemporary, look and feel.”

Inspired by their modern chalet design research, the owners wanted to anchor the great room by adding a massive fireplace that occupies much of one wall. Happily, they found just the fireplace they wanted in one book and used it as their inspiration.

“We didn’t want a mantle but wanted to keep the fireplace as simple as possible” said the wife. The fireplace is comprised of local fieldstone, including a 12-foot-long hearth fashioned from a three-ton flagstone boulder that was found nearby and moved to the site via heavy equipment.

The owners chose a muted color palette for the home’s furniture, which is minimal, because, as the wife explained, “We like the



clean look and didn’t want to distract from the view.” They chose a variety of reclaimed barn wood—elm, pine, oak—for the kitchen cabinets to both set off the space and link it to the rest of the ground floor.

Their custom-made dining table is fashioned from salvaged slabs of an elm tree in Charlotte, Vt., once one of the tallest in the Northeast, that had died from Dutch elm disease.

Shortly after the owners moved into their new home they threw a party for the friends and professionals who had made their dream home come true. One of the guests, who owns several homes in Europe, including a residence in the south of France, took Rousselle and Sisler aside to congratulate them on their collaborative creation.

“Well done!” he told them. “If I didn’t know I was in the United States, I’d swear I was standing in a chalet in France or Switzerland. You got it just right.” ■