



a home of one's own

architect creates home for his most demanding clients: himself and his wife

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When asked what qualities he was hoping to include in the design of his own home, Stowe-based architect Ernie Ruskey quickly rattled them off: "Simple, efficient, and suitable." He paused for a beat and added, "But not too simple. I wanted a home with a twist; something beyond the basic rectilinear box-like houses that so many modernist architects have created."

From the minute a visitor drives up to Ruskey's and his wife Laurie's home off Randolph Road, several miles north of Stowe, it's clear he's achieved his vision. Even at first glance it's obvious that the 3,400-square-foot house is eminently suitable for—and sympathetic to—its gently sloping, tree-filled lot.

"Every good design begins with careful siting," said Ruskey, as he greeted me outside the three-story home that looks snugly nestled, or anchored, into its wooded lot. He pointed to the garage, which is neatly, inconspicuously tucked away from the home itself and half-buried into the hillside lot. "That was a response from the land itself. We didn't alter this landscape very much." >> 192



Instead of altering the landscape, architect Ernie Ruskey, owner of Stowe's Tektonika Studio Architects, worked hard to tuck his wedge-shaped house into the existing hillside. To take full advantage of distant mountain views he filled the front of the house with numerous, differently-sized windows.

From the rear of the house one can see the covered walkway that leads to a small screened-in porch, which echoes—and balances—the covered walkway (inset) that links the garage to the house. To help break up the mass of the building Ruskey located a garage a half story below the level of the house.



In another nod to the topography, Ruskey designed the house as a long, relatively narrow wedge, which helps it blend into the contours of the hillside and also allows for long-distance, westerly views. “It was important to me to fit the house into the landscape instead of merely placing it atop it,” he explained. “I’m influenced by the Japanese aesthetic that holds a house should be married to the landscape.”

Once inside the home, the cleverness of the wedge design begins to reveal itself. At its entry point, where there’s a mudroom and a bathroom, the house is 18 feet wide. However, at the far end of the house, where the dining room cum great room is situated, the home is 24 feet wide. “The wedge design grew out of the idea that you don’t need all this room when you first enter the house but welcome it as you move through to the more public part of the house,” said Ruskey, owner of Stowe’s Tektonika Studio Architects.

As we walked into the open-plan main floor, Ruskey explained that the wedge design was often used in Renaissance times to give an altered perspective to spaces that often were not even. “There’s something interesting about walking into a space that’s slightly skewed, where things are continually expanding. It’s not static or boring like a box.”

By adding increasingly larger windows along the front wall, he helped to add a subtle sense of movement to the design. Said Laurie, “Many first-time visitors stop, look around and say, ‘There’s something going on here’ or ‘This doesn’t seem quite right,’ until they figure it out.”

The home’s interior design is as minimal as it is elegant. In an effort to help “bring the outside in,” the couple chose a natural palette, opting for clear-finished maple floors, Vermont marble countertops, sliced granite accent tiles behind a Danish Morso wood-burning stove, stainless steel, and lots of blues and grays. “We wanted the colors to be

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>> space for living



Ruskey and his wife Laurie describe their interior design as "minimal" and use a neutral color palette, but made room for treasured pieces of art. To help "bring the outside in" the living room boasts a wall full of windows and includes clear-finished strip, tongue-and-groove maple floors.

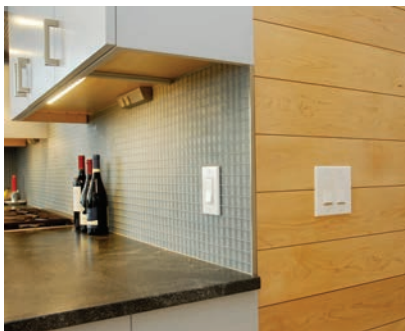


>> dine in



The focal point of the informal combination living and dining room is a super-efficient Danish Morso wood-burning stove that is backed by sliced granite accent tiles. Energy efficiency was important to Ruskey, who chose triple-paned windows and radiant heat for the floors. A cherry dining table blends easily with the natural surroundings.

>> kitchen transitions



Like the rest of the house, the large kitchen—"That was high on my wish list," said Laurie—is a study in blues and grays and natural materials. The full backsplash is comprised of glass tiles. Because of the home's novel wedge shape, the custom built-in cabinetry by Stowe-based cabinetmaker Dave Day was "a real challenge" to get exact. Wall coverings transition beautifully from the kitchen to the hallway.

>> upstairs/downstairs

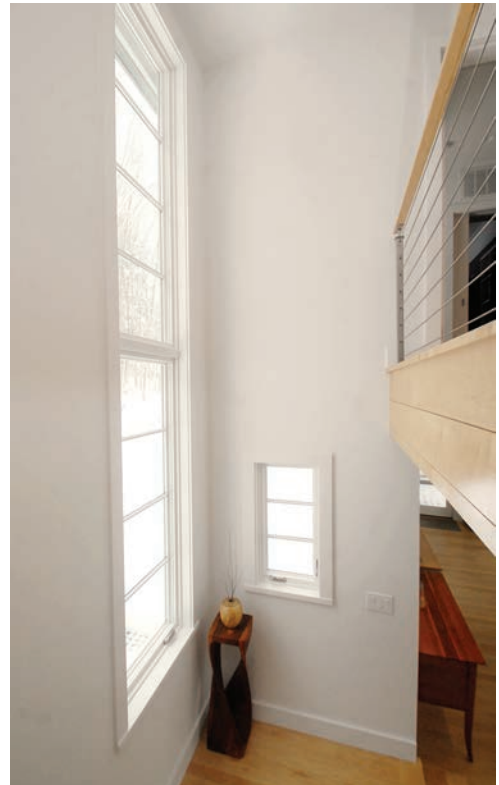


The elegant open maple

stairway was crafted by Stowe builder Steve Sisler's crew and called for precise work. "There's no trim anywhere on the stairway so everything has to be exact," explained Sisler. The Ruskeys wanted to make the most of their backyard view so they added an oversize, tall rectangular window in the stairwell. The window is perfectly positioned to frame two large trees in the rear of the house from both the first and second floors.



>> clean, crisp lines



In keeping with his minimal design theme, Ruskey used stainless steel cables topped by a maple handrail on the home's stairway and included linear LED lighting fixtures to light the area.

>> all-purpose room



Laurie works from home and her second-floor office can double as a guest bedroom and includes a wall of built-ins that “hide” everything from computers to printers to files.

>> the master and bath



The master bedroom has a bank of corner windows that look out on distant vistas and also offer up-close views of beech and birch trees that were lovingly spared during the home's construction. The bath boasts his and her sinks in custom cabinets. Closet hardware is sleek and modern.



>> washroom



The walls of the master bathroom are tiled floor to ceiling and the glass-paneled shower has a sloped floor that makes a threshold unnecessary.

>> the spare



Like much of the custom cabinetry in the home, this first-floor powder room vanity "floats" above the floor in keeping with the home's modern, minimal aesthetic. A side table accents the bathroom.



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