

Dream Home

ONE MAN'S HOME...

If you could have a home designed just for you, and you alone, what would it be? This skier saw his vision come true on a hillside in Stowe.

A collaboration among the owner, Middlebury architects McLeod Kredell and Stowe's Sister Builders produced this stunning one-story home for an art collector and avid cross-country skier.



When Jim Zajac got to the point where he was ready to build a home in the Green Mountains, he turned to the Middlebury-based architecture firm McLeod Kredell. He gave them a rough sketch of what he wanted in a ski home. "His drawing was a square with four boxes, each marked with a function," says architect John McLeod.

"It was a very elemental scheme of four or five rooms," Zajac explains. "I wanted a single story because at the time I had a Corgi and they don't do so well with stairs. I needed a living area, sleeping area, cooking area and mudroom. It was very important to have some kind of a workspace where I could get dirty and stay warm in the winter."

But a box-like home was not what Zajac, who has a keen interest in the arts, was looking for. He wanted something more creative and gave the architects broad reign.

"I could not have envisioned what we got," says Zajac.

Like a piece of origami or a child's cootie catcher, McLeod Kredell unfolded the squares of the box into a cruciform with an enclosed courtyard in the middle. With its jutting gabled metal roofs, the one-story home looks a bit like a futuristic plane ready to soar over the field below and out across the mountains.

The roofline is as functional as it is aesthetic.

At the entryway wing, the gabled overhang juts out far enough to function as a carport. Off the living room, it provides shade to the concrete cantilevered porch. Off the bedroom wing, it protects an outdoor shower and off Zajac's workshop, it covers the sliding glass doors where Zajac brings his skis into the workshop.

"I had rented in Stowe for seven years before making the decision to buy land and build something of my own," says Zajac, a lawyer who works in New York City and has a home on the eastern end of Long Island. "I love Nordic skiing and would often go to the trails at Trapp Family Lodge." What attracted him in part to the land he bought was that it was near the VAST (Vermont Association of Snow Travelers) trails. "I can literally ski out my backyard all the way to Sterling Valley or to the Stowe Rec path," he says.

Each wing of the 2,400-sq.-ft. house has its own entry to the outdoors. Coming back from a ski, Zajac can slide open the doors to what he calls his "no-car garage," and put his skis on the tuning bench. An avid potter, the other side of the room houses his turning wheel. Sliding doors shut the area off from the main part of the house.

The main entry opens into a shallow hallway facing a partial wall with custom cabinets and closets that Sisler Builders, the builder on the project, fabricated. The cabinets frame a piece from Zajac's art collection, a work by contemporary Dutch artist Marian Bijleng that uses delicate fish scales floating on a web of microfibers.

Behind the wall is a laundry area, bright with the natural light

Light streams into the south facing living room of Jim Zajac's home in Stowe. Architects McLeod Kredell drew inspiration from some of the early examples of modern architecture from the 1930s, such as Stowe's Hob Knob Inn and Mount Mansfield base lodge. The interior courtyard (top) with its simple gravel and granite is reminiscent of Japanese gardens. Sisler created the custom cabinetry throughout.

Photos courtesy Sisler Builders



that spills in from the large windows that open onto the small central courtyard. Directly across the courtyard is a small bathroom and beyond that, hidden behind another partial wall, the sleeping wing.

There, a bed is tucked into a wall of cabinets almost like a Murphy bed. Just beyond is a stunning bathroom, paved with dark gray ceramic tiles, an open shower and a sunken bathtub. An enclosed toilet is off to one side and just out the door beneath the cantilever is an outdoor shower as well.

What is remarkable about the home is that other than for the toilets and the closets, none of the interior walls rise to the ceiling and none of the wings or "rooms" have interior doors. This gives it an open and airy flow.

What further adds to the feeling of airiness is the roof and ceiling appear to float on an exposed internal frame. Posts placed a few inches in front of the floor-to-ceiling windows support massive beams that stretch the length of each wing. The wood panels on the ceiling extend past the exterior walls to the eaves. Stowe's Sisler Builders craftsmanship is evident in the joinerwork, trim and custom cabinetry.

The kitchen backs to the interior courtyard with a window acting as a backsplash behind stove. Beyond the kitchen island, the living area/dining room extends toward the southern end of the house which is all glass and sliding doors, giving extensive views of the field and mountains beyond.

Tucked into the walls of the living room are the fireplace and a work area. "John [McLeod] called those 'saddlebags,'" says Zajac. "I didn't want to have the fireplace sticking out in the room, particularly because if I wanted to put down a carpet it would be very difficult to deal with that. So John came up with the idea of a cantilevered fireplace. And then the desk followed suit."

Doing so allowed the lines of the living room to remain streamlined with the exterior cantilevered areas hidden from most views of the house.

The house is not a big place. There is no basement, no garage, no attic. As McLeod notes, this house is not for everyone. "We designed this house for Jim and I can't imagine designing it for anyone else."

"It's not a house for a family with children, it's a house for one or two," says Zajac. "The decision to build in that way opened up a whole lot of potential. If you think of places like the Farnsworth house or the Glass House. They're very similar. You don't need doors if there are no people who need to be excluded," he says, referring to the groundbreaking modern designs by architects Mies van der Rohe (Farnsworth) and Philip Johnson (Glasshouse).

But it is one man's castle. ■

The window behind the kitchen looks into the courtyard, giving the room a feeling of greater space (top). The workroom holds a turning bench and pottery wheel. The bathroom walls feature handmade tiles from Heath Ceramics in California. Opposite page: The paneled ceiling on the carport matches the interior ceiling. The cantilevered fireplace sits flush with the interior walls. From the air, the cruciform shape stands out with two red Herman Miller chairs on the concrete deck.

