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A photograph of a wooden deck with a large potted plant and a view of mountains. The deck is made of light-colored wood and has a large, dark brown, cylindrical planter in the center. The planter is filled with a variety of plants, including green leafy plants, orange flowers, and dark red foliage. In the background, there are mountains and a body of water, with a warm, golden light suggesting sunset or sunrise. The text "WORLD VIEW" is overlaid in white, sans-serif font across the middle of the image.

WORLD VIEW

THE CHALLENGE WAS to site the house so it takes advantage of the stunning views across Lake Champlain to the Adirondack Mountains while also respecting the landscape. The solution: Dig into the slope. Now only the roofline is visible from the road.



A WINDOW-FILLED FAMILY HOME IN VERMONT IS A FUSION OF EURO AND ASIAN SENSIBILITIES

Written by KATHLEEN JAMES Photography by JIM WESTPHALEN
Architecture and Interiors by TRUOX CULLINS & PARTNERS ARCHITECTS

CRUISING DOWN A DIRT ROAD THROUGH A RESIDENTIAL development 10 miles south of Burlington, Vermont, architect Lee Grutchfield quietly points out what we do not see: the house. As the car approaches the driveway, all that's visible is a low roofline and a sweeping view across Lake Champlain to the rugged Adirondacks.

"The owners had clear goals," says Grutchfield. "They wanted a home made of natural materials that was carefully integrated into the landscape. They wanted open rooms and big vistas, a sense of place and space. And they wanted a home that evoked joy and spiritual sustenance."

Grutchfield, an associate at Truex Cullins & Partners Architects in Burlington, designed the house in 2006 with firm principal Rolf Kielman. Their first challenge, Grutchfield says, was to properly position the home in a way that respected the land, yet took advantage of the stunning views. Most of the 5-acre lot is a steep hillside that tumbles toward the shoreline of the long, narrow lake. With the help of Vermont landscape architect H. Keith Wagner, the team decided to dig out a west-facing site tucked behind a tall berm just below the top of the hill. As a result, the house seems more of the hill than on it. The all-natural exterior — white-cedar shingles, copper for the roof, a sandstone chimney, and red-cedar clapboards that will weather gracefully over time — pays homage to the pastoral setting.



THE CLEAN LINES of the great room create a Zen-like feeling. A series of sliding 8-foot-high doors opens to a narrow covered deck. The doors mirror the floor-to-ceiling windows that flank the sandstone fireplace. "In summer, the sliding doors are wide open, and it feels like we're living outside," says the owner.



THE LARGE KITCHEN ISLAND (TOP), which features a bar sink, two built-in refrigerators, and a dishwasher, is perfect for these homeowners who love to entertain. A gently curving hallway (BOTTOM) with exposed ductwork leads to the children's "office," where an interior window overlooks the great room.

The architectural style is a cool fusion that reflects the clients' international, outdoorsy outlook. The husband was born and raised in Switzerland, and he and his wife travel several times a year to Europe and Asia on business. With slightly curved rooflines and a clean, spare design, their house — inside and out — has a sophisticated, Euro-meets-Asia vibe.

This sensibility is most evident in the great room, which feels a bit like a Japanese temple, with much wood, many windows, strong horizontal lines, and a Zen-like ambience imparted by the vastness of the space. A Buddha reclines on an unobtrusive mantel, and the chimney soars 20-plus feet to a vaulted fir ceiling. On each side of the fireplace, a wall of windows reaches to the peaked roofline. "The horizontal beams and ceiling panels shoot right through the windows," says Grutchfield, "which allows for a powerful visual connection between indoors and out." The western wall consists entirely of floor-to-ceiling sliding doors that open to a narrow covered deck and screened porch.

At the northern end of the great room, the airy, open kitchen is delineated by a substantial work island topped with a heavy soapstone counter. "This is a very convivial house," says Truex Cullins interior designer Cecilia Redmond. "Our clients love to entertain, and everyone ends up gathered around the island," which offers tons of counter space and is outfitted with a bar sink, two small refrigerators (one for soda and beer, the other for wine), and a dishwasher (one of two in the kitchen). Nearby, a walk-in pantry "took the pressure off the kitchen so we didn't need as many wall cabinets," says Redmond.

"We spend 80 percent of our time in the kitchen and living room," the owner says of her family, which includes two children. "The kids do their homework and play in front of the fire; it's very relaxed and casual. It's a great space for being together."

Upstairs, a hallway with curving walls and industrial-looking exposed ductwork leads to the children's "office," a cozy room with two matching desks and laptop computers as well as an interior window that looks down into the great room. The owner notes: "Everyone has their own private space in our house, yet we have as few rooms as possible. The rooms are bigger and more spacious."

Brightly painted kids' bedrooms sit side by side, connected by a distinctly child-sized 3-foot-high "crawl-through" door. Each bedroom has a wide window seat — as big as a twin bed, with a thick cushion on top (awesome for sleepovers). From another set of windows, the rooms have a view of the hillside and carriage house. "This house is fun and functional," says the owner. "We live a casual lifestyle, and the house reflects that."

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Grutchfield is pleased to hear that. "As an architect," he says, "the goal is to imbue the house with the spirit and intentions of the client." Adds Redmond: "You sweat and think about every little detail during the planning and building phase. You think endlessly, 'How will they use that? How will this work?' It's gratifying to return and see a family using their home exactly as we had all hoped and intended." ■





DESIGN DECISIONS

Outside In

At Truex Cullins & Partners Architects, the goal is to create buildings of lasting value that stand out by blending in. “We try to connect the inside with the outside,” says Lee Grutchfield (TOP LEFT). “Buildings that are integrated with their surroundings — with the natural world — are timeless and offer a sense of spiritual sustenance.”



To make this connection, Grutchfield and Truex principal Rolf Kielman (BOTTOM LEFT), the lead residential designers for the firm, suggest clients follow these guidelines:

- **BLUR THE BOUNDARIES** Grutchfield and Kielman use big walls of windows to connect with nature. “With a window, the layer between you and the natural world is quite thin,” says Grutchfield.

- **WIDE-OPEN SPACES** The firm takes traditional architecture and adds modern elements, such as lofty spaces.

“Traditional New England architecture, for example, is quite dark and austere,” says Grutchfield. “We’ll use those classic lines and materials — post-and-beam or clapboards — while designing a home with an open floor plan and lots of windows.”

- **LOOK TO THE LIGHT** “Natural light can lend a spiritual, timeless feeling to a home,” says Grutchfield. “Think of the great cathedrals, filled with light streaming down from above. It gives a sense of uplift, of ascension.”



THE 4,600-SQUARE-foot home has a small lawn, with clean, geometric landscaping; the rest of the 5-acre property is a steep hillside that slopes toward the lake. The carriage house has a three-bay garage and an unfinished second floor, where the owners are planning a home office and an art studio.