



Kate Carter

The Renovation Process

A house built for one family gets renovated for another

By Kate Carter

Building projects run most smoothly and cost effectively when there is a good team, open communication, and mutual trust. This house went through a significant renovation process, and, even though the owners were not entirely clear on what they wanted initially, the process was successful, because it had the right ingredients.

Sisler Builders built the house in 2000 for a Realtor who worked extensively in Stowe. She and her husband wanted a house large enough to accommodate them and their grown children, who were starting families of their own. The main floor was designed for single-level living, with a master suite, open floor plan, cathedral ceilings, and tasteful accents. Kids' bedrooms were upstairs, and the basement had a rec room and storage.

When they put the house on the market 16 years lat-

er, prospective buyers, Frank and Sue Zilka, consulted with Sisler Builders before buying it. "We knew Sisler Builders had built the house so we contacted Steve and asked him to come take a look and see what he could do for us. We wanted it to be a gathering place for us, our three children, and their friends," Frank explains. After a conversation with Steve, they bought the house and asked him to renovate it to accommodate their needs.

The renovation team consisted of the owners, builder, and interior designer. Communication was easy, fast, and non-contentious. At first, Frank and Sue just wanted to upgrade a few rooms to be more to their taste. "It had a Cape Cod-style interior and we wanted a more modern feel," Frank says. "Then we got 'builder's

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creep' and kept deciding to do more. Our intention was to spend six months a year in Stowe, so once we got rolling we decided to go for it."

Even though it took Frank and Sue awhile to figure out what they ultimately wanted, by keeping communication open and offering suggestions based on many years of knowledge and experience, the project moved along efficiently.



Custom bunk beds. Photo by Erica Allen.

Frank has a building background as well as a mechanical one, and knows how complicated a renovation process can be. He was impressed with how easy it was to work with Sisler Builders. "The house was completely torn apart, but it all came together within six months. Sisler Builders has an amazing crew and the project manager, Brian Irwin, was super to work with. Steve has great oversight of his staff and contractors and provided a premium, top-quality product."

"It was very easy to relay my visions to Steve," says Sue, who grew up designing and building homes with her father. She was involved in building her family's first house, and from there became interested in interior decorating. "Steve has knowledge and vision, too, so it was easy to work together."

The original house had good bones, which also helped streamline the process. The majority of the renovations took place in the basement, where Frank and Sue wanted a bedroom suite with radiant heat and to change the office into a bunk room, with custom bunk beds based on Sue's vision. "I drew my bunk bed idea on a napkin and we had a 10-minute meeting," she says. "Steve got the idea right away. He talked to the finish carpenters and they took the idea and ran with it. That's what you get with an experienced builder."

The rec room was also completely revamped, and now has a stunning gas fireplace surrounded by a magnificent granite slab. The room was enlarged by incorporating the former storage room. All the floors were finished in the same antique heart pine flooring the upstairs has. "This might be my favorite room," Sue says. "It's soundproof, so you can't hear anything else going on in the house. The granite slab is about 8 by 12 feet and has a beautiful grain. It took a lot to get it to Vermont, cut out a section for the fireplace, and get it into the basement. It's magnificent!"

Upstairs Sisler Builders upgraded the air conditioning, remodeled the bathrooms, enlarged the mudroom, and installed attractive wainscoting throughout the foyer. They also did some energy upgrades by changing the oil boiler to a high-efficiency gas-fired one, and did significant air sealing and insulation improvements.

Outside, they expanded the patio that is accessed from the walk-out basement, changed the



Propane fireplace inserted into granite slab. Photo by Erica Allen.

deck support system to be more airy, added a staircase between the upper deck and the patio below, and installed a hot tub. The main-level deck was redone, with new Ipe decking and a transparent railing. A clever pan system with integrated gutters was installed under the new decking to protect the patio below. The exterior was completely repainted with fresh colors.

The end result is a comfortable haven to come home to after a day on the slopes. "It's a real livable house," says Frank. "The previous owners had a good vision and that gave us a good start." Despite lacking a complete plan, the project ran efficiently, changes were easily incorporated, and costs were reasonable, because the optimum ingredients were in place: a good team, open communication, and mutual trust.

Slugs vs. Moose

By Luke Sisler

“Give a hit, take a hit. Get in the game.” I remember an old hockey coach saying. I chipped the puck off the boards and into the zone, then braced for impact. I lean in for the contact with a small jump. Survived. And the game gains momentum.

I play on a hockey team, the Stowe Slugs. We are the premiere old-man team in Vermont. There’s a league for non-contact hockey that guys out of college like to play, called the Catamount League. The pace is quick, but there’s no hitting allowed. We all know that we need to get up and work on Monday. The Slugs have won the Catamount League championship three years running.

Now, however, we were out in Jackson, Wy., playing contact hockey against their home-town team, the Jackson Hole Moose.

Jackson gets rowdy for hockey. They have games Friday and Saturday nights at 7 pm. In addition to hockey, there’s live music between periods, co-ed youths playing before they do the ice, local beer for sale, pizza, kids running around in fashionable red Moose Hockey sweatshirts with skate laces for neck draws. Typical attendance is 1,100 fans, an incredible turnout for a town of 10,000. It’s an all-around good time.

We were invited because I lived in Jackson for two winters and had the privilege of playing on the team. They are in their own league, the Black Diamond Hockey League, but they invite out-of-conference competition, like us—the Stowe Slugs—to come play. They provide lodging, transportation from the airport, a gear stash room at the rink, a pregame skate Friday morning, and discounted lift tickets to the Snow King ski hill in town. Again, it’s an all-around good time.

But, they play contact hockey. For some of the guys on the Slugs, this is the first game of contact hockey they’ve played in two decades. We are in it now, though.

The first play of the game, my center won the draw clean, and I, the right winger, backed out into space and moved up ice. The pass put me into the danger zone with their D-man, who stepped up to play the man. I chipped the puck past him and took the hit. My mind was in it.

After 5 minutes the Moose are up 2-0. The Slugs are

working into the game, trying to catch their breath at 6,200-foot elevation, and playing their first full-length game. We warmed into the game slowly, 3-0, 7 minutes in. Dang.

Everyone got their second shift and settled in. Finally, 3-1 with 2 minutes left in the first. A well-executed breakout, a decent entrance to their zone, and a sloppy goal gave us hope.

The hockey games were back and forth. Lots of Vermonters on the ice. Much of their team is from the East Coast and many from Vermont. It’s good competition,



The Slugs' Nick Sisler (right) reaches in to grab the puck.

with some former college players and a few ex-pro’s, but everyone goes to work on Monday. Jackson is so far away from real quality hockey, or professional sport of any kind, that the Moose are revered. Their youth program is a part of the Moose organization, so many of the players are coaches. This helps create the aura of good hockey. We put on a show for the fans and enjoyed the rest of the trip. There was one fight, stitches in the locker room post-game, hits, net-front skirmishes, goals, and celebrations. Everything you could want in a hockey game.

During the days the team rented snowmobiles to go nine miles up a roadless back canyon to a hot spring, others went skiing at the world renowned Jackson Hole Mountain Resort, some relaxed and went into the national elk refuge to see the elk, mountain goats, bighorn sheep, and bison. Did I say yet that it’s an all-around good time?

When it was all said and done, we lost both games by one. But really, we let them win. Because—as the ref said in explanation of a bad call—“no one is here to watch the Slugs win.” That said, our trip was a success.



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In the News

LEAP Energy Fair—The next, and 13th annual, energy fair is on April 6, 2019. Steve Sisler, who sits on the board of directors, organizes the speakers and break-out sessions about a variety of topics, such as heat pumps, solar energy, and energy audits. Sisler Builders will have an exhibit table and participate in the break-out sessions. For more info about the fair go to WaterburyLeap.com.

New Woodworking Shop—We are moving our woodworking shop to a new location on Route 100, Waterbury Center, across from Sunflower Natural Foods. The shop will enable us to do more custom woodworking for our clients (see custom bunk beds, page 2). Watch for our grand opening later this fall!



Ask the craftsmen.

What is the most effective way to start a new building or renovation process?

Often people think they should hire an architect first, get a design done, and give it to builders to bid on. We suggest that you start with the builder first, because builders will have the most current information on local costs (materials, subcontractors, etc.). This way revisions won't need to be made before the project even starts, or in the midst of it. Architects, especially those from out of town, may not be as familiar with codes, insulation requirements, and what is available locally. Find a builder through the recommendation of friends, Realtors, architects, and word of mouth. Research them, learn about their reputation, breadth of projects, experience, and if they've built anything similar to your vision. Once you've vetted a builder, meet face-to-face and find out if you have good chemistry. Then you and the builder can bring in an architect if one is desired, and move forward together as a team.

*Send your building question to Ask@SislerBuilders.com.
We'll answer it in our next newsletter.*