

Total space conversion



By Kate Carter, photos by Erica Allen

When Sisler Builders' owner Steve and his wife Sharon built their house in Waterbury Center in 1984, they had no idea it would go through several transformations over the next 38 years. Like most builders, they were game for the challenge of improving their own living space, and in 2000 they doubled the size of the house with an addition on the back. In 2012 they added a third bay to the 2-car garage with a space for a custom woodworking shop above it.

As the business grew, the demand for custom woodworking services increased. It didn't take long for the custom woodworking division to outgrow the space above the garage. In 2019 they relocated to their current location on Route 100 in Waterbury Center.

Steve and Sharon were faced with a new decision: What should they do with the vacant space over the garage? They



considered numerous options: a caretaker for when they traveled, a place to age in, a finished apartment for visiting friends and family, a show room for what the woodworking team could do. They settled on a long-term tenant and negotiated a lower rent in exchange for housesitting when they were away. The tenant also agreed to allow Sisler Builders to occasionally use the apartment as a showroom.

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Renovations *cont. from page 1*

Steve's vision for the apartment had percolated for years. He wanted a Scandinavian feel—open, sunny, light colors, and specific wood finishes. “Western hemlock is my favorite wood and Siberian larch complements it. I used the more refined hemlock for cabinets and doors and the larch on the sloped ceilings and floors.”

Sisler Builders' custom woodworking team excelled in the kitchen. Their detail-oriented skills highlighted the horizontal grains of the western hemlock that flows seamlessly from one cabinet to the next, uninterrupted by hardware.

“Western hemlock has a very straight and linear grain and was perfect for this application,” said custom woodworking division manager Seth Allen. They had some solid hemlock leftover from a previous job, but not enough, so the woodworking team resawed the hemlock into 3/16-inch solid wood veneers, thereby achieving the square footage to fulfill their needs.

“We started with the curved soffit and used its framing form as our hemlock form. Once that was done, we brought the rest of the cabinetry and mill work to fruition. We engineered every piece for the kitchen as well as several cabinets and doors, all of which carry the linear matched grain theme throughout the apartment, necessitating diligent labeling and sorting when engineering the parts,” said Allen. “The result was a stunning look to a space that Steve had spent a long time designing in his head before anything was put on paper.”

The apartment's living space is small and effective, with many built-in spaces that cleverly blend with the overall layout, yet the



Danish Rais circular stove in the living room is propane-fired and comes from Green Mountain Fireplace, Williston. Larch flooring by MAFI, Siberian larch on sloped ceilings, and western hemlock for window trim and cabinetry.



KWE kitchen faucet and Kraus stainless sink from Close to Home. Native Vermont Royal Danby marble countertop and backsplash by Burlington Marble & Granite. Custom-made ebony door and drawer handles by Sisler Builders' woodworking team.



Siberian larch was used for custom-made storage and cubbies, while large, format durable floor-to-ceiling tiles begin in the mud room and continue up the stairs to the office area and bathroom.

The hip-high divider at the top of the stairwell has 3/16-inch strips of white oak woven through verticals to create a basket weave. The dark stain was achieved by oxidizing steel wool with vinegar, which causes the steel to break down. The tannins in the oak react with it to create an amazing deep black stain.





Elliptical wall between living area and bedroom allows for adequate space in each room. Curved wood soffit helps differentiate various areas, and provides space to run the fresh-air system ductwork.

open floor plan lends a spacious and airy feel. The clean, stark, benign Scandinavian ambiance is softened with transition zones and elliptical elements.

Another major challenge Steve wanted to master was maintaining the look of the exterior, which meant keeping the existing windows where they were. “I thought for months about how to get an adequate-sized bedroom and living room, while keeping the windows in place, thus the crux of the entire project—an elliptical wall.” The curved theme is enhanced by the kitchen soffit, necessary to hide ductwork and mechanicals, and the height transition helps delineate spaces. The kitchen and hallway have 8-foot-2-inch ceilings while the living room has a 9-foot-4-inch ceiling. The curves happen at the intersection of the ceiling height change, in the kitchen island, and also in the wall that separates the living space from the bedroom.

The entire apartment (as well as the house) is net zero, due to an off-site solar array. The magnetic induction range and refrigerator are electric, lights are all LED, and the living room’s stove is propane and serves as an emergency back-up to the high-efficiency air-to-air heat pumps that become less efficient at temps below minus 10 degrees.

The result is a stunningly beautiful, highly local, super-energy-efficient apartment that provides a much-needed long-term rental near Stowe, as well as a space to showcase the custom woodworking team’s amazing talents!



Floor-to-ceiling Porcelanosa tile installed by Joe Duffy. Vanity top and waterfall end panel of native Vermont slate, fabricated and installed by Burlington Marple and Granite. Window extension jambs of the same slate.

In the News

Sisler Builders is concerned about energy efficiency and the building industry’s impact on the environment. In order to reduce their own fossil fuel consumption and greenhouse emissions they are moving toward a fleet of electric vehicles. Owner Steve Sisler’s job involves a lot of driving to job sites. To act on their mission, they bought their first electric vehicle, a Tesla Model S, in 2014. The company also brought several hybrids onto their fleet. Now, as the industry has caught up to their needs, they were able to add a fully electric pickup truck, the Rivian R1T, and they have another pickup on order, a Ford F150



The new Rivian R1T fully electric pickup.

Lightening. “As more suitable electric vehicles become available, we will add them to our fleet, as long as they continue to fit our needs,” said Sisler.



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Ask the *craftsmen.*

What type of roof insulation system should my house have?

In the four decades Sisler Builders has been building homes in and around Stowe, roof insulation systems have changed dramatically. In the 80s and early 90s, fiberglass insulation was the standard; it had limitations regarding performance when wet, r-value, and moisture vapor transmission, so quality builders had to devise ways to allow any moisture that got into the insulation to escape. Those methods came to be known as “cold roofs,” where a space was maintained between the upper face of the insulation and the underside of the roof sheathing.

As roofs and ceilings became more complicated, with hips, soaring cathedrals, shed and gable dormers, and curves, a better method became necessary to effectively manage vapor-laden air escaping through the insulation. The building industry began using high-density spray foam and dense-pack cellulose. These “warm roof” construction procedures allowed for success in complex roofs because air movement wasn’t required. Also, both insulations have low enough permeability ratings, so moisture vapor going from the living space to the underside of the

insulation doesn’t penetrate and deteriorate it. Homes built with these insulation methods became tight enough that mechanical ventilation became necessary to maintain good indoor air quality during the heating months.

Recently, contemporary homes with low-pitch roofs have become popular. These roofs require a robust structure since snow doesn’t slide off them. Frequently, these are paired with a “cold roof” overbuild, so there is a desired disconnect between any warmth escaping from the insulated area and the cold of a sub-zero night on the underside of the roof sheathing. High density spray foam insulation is a good choice because it has a high R value per inch, creates a very tight insulated envelope, and isn’t negatively affected by moisture vapor issues.

Hopefully this gives you a basic understanding of the various types of roof insulation systems that have been used over the decades, so you know how your house may fit into this picture.

*Send your building question to
Ask@SislerBuilders.com.*

We’ll answer it in our next newsletter.

