



Quality Craftsmanship | Stowe, Vermont

# the craftsman

Spring 2024

## Show-stopper renovation



By Kate Carter

A couple, whose primary home is in Houston, Texas, was searching for a second home in a cooler climate, and focused their search in Vermont, where the husband's family is from. Fortuitously, a house adjacent to the brother's property came on the market, and the couple loved the location, not only because of the proximity to family, but also for the amazing views of the Worcester Range.

The house, however, was a different story. It was a Huntington manufactured home built in the 1970s, and few improvements had been done over the years. The couple could see the potential of a whole-house renovation, so they reached out to their neighbor, architectural designer Rob Colber of RMC Design, in Waterbury Vt, to help flesh out their vision.

"The original home was very compartmentalized," Colber noted. "The rooms were small and it felt closed off and dark. The owners wanted to open the spaces up as much as possible and create a flowing modern farmhouse feel, with more light and higher ceilings."

Having researched contractors, the owners selected Sisler Builders, thanks to all the positive recommendations that came their way. "When we met Steve Sisler, he exuded trust and confidence," the wife said. "It didn't take long to know Sisler Builders was the crew we wanted for the job."

Sisler Builders' project manager for the renovation, Bryan Kelley, remembers his first impressions of the



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## Show stopper

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house. “The house, although dated on the inside, had a nice exterior and a beautiful landscape. A major renovation would revitalize the house and enhance the entire property.”

Colbert recommended interior designer Amber Hodgins of Amber Hodgins Design to bring cohesiveness to the project. “I brought Amber in early on to form a team right out of the gate. We were able to be expedient about design decisions because the team was already assembled.”

“The owner had a strong sense of what she wanted and we spent a lot of time together,” Hodgins said. “I did numerous drawings, working from Colbert’s floor plan. I looked at everything cohesively. Textures and tones all have to be part of the same story.”

Sisler Builders retained the original footprint and then got busy. They removed all the interior walls in the main living area to create an open concept plan, with several beams spanning the length of the space.

“Removing the walls required relocating a few essential rooms,” Kelly noted. “We reconfigured the main entry walk-in from the garage to the mud room by taking some space from the garage, creating space for a laundry room at one end, custom cabinetry for storage, and a new powder room.”

The kitchen had unused attic space overhead, so Sisler Builders tore out the existing flat ceiling, adding structural framing as needed, and converted it to a vaulted ceiling with antique beams to add volume to the desired open floor plan. The transformation continued, with Merillat cabinetry, stainless appliances, and an island with quartz countertops. White oak floating shelves created by Sisler Builders’ woodworking team gives the kitchen a smart, crisp, modern look.

Sisler Builders also installed new oversized sliding glass doors in the living room and primary bedroom that open out to a large deck spanning the east side of the house, where the mountain and pond views are best. In a corner of the living room they installed a new fireplace with a raised stone hearth and



*This page: Kitchen ceiling was vaulted into unused attic space and has antique beams to create volume and distinguish it from the living room's flat ceiling. Flow was improved by tearing down walls to create the desired open floor plan vision. Primary bedroom with new flooring, windows, and en-suite bathroom. Page 3: New fireplace/entertainment space adds ambiance. Expanded mud room with half bath and live-edge bench. Sisler Builders returned the following summer to install the outdoor shower and enlarge the deck on the west side of the house that overlooks the Worcester Range. Photos by Kate Carter.*



live-edge mantel, and Sisler Builders' woodworking team designed and created custom built-ins for one side of the fireplace.

"The biggest challenge for me was creating the entire fireplace/hearth/entertainment center that shared a wall with an A/V niche in the primary bedroom," noted Colbert. "There was a lot going on between the walls—flue, wiring, outlets, a plumbing chase to the newly created upstairs bathrooms, and getting the stones placed properly for the hearth."

The owners were quick to point out that all of this transpired during Covid. "It took much longer than expected. Materials were delayed and the garage became a staging area so that when things arrived, we had a place to store them."

Hodgins said the timing during Covid had all the usual glitches. "There were so many delays, hiccups, and frustration along the way, but the end result is stunning. It's beautiful and on point. It's such a huge difference and it looks like a brand-new home!"

Colbert agreed. "It was super successful; they created a space that is bright and open and suitable for entertaining. We brought their vision to fruition and it transitioned from a mediocre house to a statement."

The following summer, Sisler Builders returned to install an out-



door shower and enlarge the deck that overlooks the stunning views of the Worcester Range. Thanks to clear vision, a great team, patience, collaboration, and flexibility, what started out to be not exactly the owners' dream house, became their dream come true. "It exceeded our expectations. We love it!"



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## In the News

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### Where do all the wood scraps go?

We know first hand that woodshops create an abundance of scrap wood, which is fine for winter heating, but it builds up over the summer and becomes a challenge to rehome. Recycling is important to Sisler Builders, so it was great news when their woodworking division manager, Seth Allen, came up with a win-win solution.

Allen's long-time friend, Phil Young, is the applied mathematics and technology teacher at Essex Middle School. His curriculum integrates math studies with their woodworking program. "We are always looking for wood scraps for the students to use in their projects," Young said. Several times a year he drives to Sisler Builders' woodworking shop in Waterbury Center to fill his truck with scraps they've set aside for him. In his class, students learn woodworking skills, how to use various tools, and,

oh yes, math—geometry and proportional relationships.

"If it weren't for Sisler Builders, the only wood they'd be working with is pine," Young said. "Using Sisler Builders' beautiful hardwood scraps, their projects take on a new life, and they learn about different wood species."

Seth Allen is excited about the wood scraps program. "Young's program is unique because every kid in the school takes his class. They follow along with the math program, applying real-world solutions to woodshop projects," he said. "We are excited because this allows all students to get their hands dirty and see how cool woodworking can be. Our industry is a dying trade today due to computers and robots and mass production! I figure if we hook even two or three kids to want to continue in the wood industry, that is a win."



**SISLER**  
BUILDERS

56 Park Street, PO Box 605  
Stowe, Vermont 05672  
802-253-5672  
SislerBuilders.com

## Ask the craftsmen.

### *How do you create those magical floating shelves?*

Thoughtful advance planning is key to creating the clean, modern look that floating shelves provide.

First, we attach metal brackets to the solid framing before the wall and finishes are completed. If the wall is finished where the shelves will go, the wall finishes must be removed to provide access to the studs. If that's not an option, we use a different type of hardware that is applied over the finishes. The shelf thickness may need to be adjusted to fully conceal the face-applied hardware.

Floating shelves impose torque forces, so the deeper the shelf, the more robust the brackets need to be. We mount our preferred L-shaped brackets onto the studs or blocking (if studs are not spaced appropriately for the shelf location). The brackets have dowels perpendicular to the wall that extend into the room.

Shelving must be fabricated ahead of time, whether

it's painted, live edge, or glued. Then we bore holes into the wall edge of the shelves. The dowels that extend from the brackets get inserted into the holes. Setting the brackets must be precise. We use a line laser to ensure the shelves will be level. After the brackets are installed and the wall finishes are on, we apply glue inside the bored holes, and slide the shelves on. Voila! Once the glue dries, they are good to go.



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If shelves interact with tile or paneling, it becomes even more complicated. We must account for layout, so no interactions are awkwardly small or asymmetric. In any case, the earlier the modern design feature is planned, the cleaner it looks.

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

*We'll answer it in our next newsletter.*

