



Pope House

Couple discovers retirement dream in unlikely property

Looking out from the Pope house, tucked below the Worcester Range, waves of hay undulate in a warm summer breeze, the Green Mountains etched against a deep blue sky across the horizon. Fast



EXTERIOR HOUSE PHOTOS: BILL AND SYLVIA POPE



Clockwise from opposite page: The Pope farmhouse from its front. The house in winter, built in the Vermont vernacular with attached outbuildings. The property's original chalet, which now serves as the "barn," connects house to garage; the old chalet is now used as a guest quarters. While the outside of the farmhouse employs traditional Vermont architectural styles, the Popes leaned toward a contemporary design for the interior.

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On the field side of the house is a fieldstone ha-ha wall, a British idea of an earlier century that allowed sheep to graze close to the manse without being able to come right up to the door. Sylvia has no interest in raising sheep but is in love with the works of Anthony Trollope, whose books often feature estates with ha-ha walls.



forward to a crisp winter morning, and cross-country skis hiss as they cross the same meadow, now frozen and blanketed with snow. It's just what Sylvia and Willard "Bill" Pope dreamed of: a peaceful home of stately proportions, in tune with its natural surroundings, offering tranquility and privacy no matter the season.

The Popes often bicycled by this beautiful rolling meadow on summer afternoons, so when the 30-acre parcel came on the market, they seized the opportunity to start planning the perfect retirement home for their eventual flight from Brookline, Mass. Bill, an environmental lawyer, has deep roots in Vermont, growing up in Burlington where his father was chair of the English department at the University of Vermont. He and Sylvia spent weekends and vacations with their children in Stowe, where over the years they owned a series of second homes.

Their vision was simple: a home that was easy to maintain inside and out, energy efficient and comfortable for two but with room for visiting friends, children and grandchildren. They had fallen in love with the Guptil House, a Greek-Revival farmhouse near Country Club of Vermont in Waterbury, and wanted to echo those classic lines while creating an interior that suited and reflected a more contemporary lifestyle. And Bill was set on having a Scandinavian-style woodstove, the kind with a large firebox that will heat a home for hours.

Initially, the Popes balked at using an architect. "I was scared to talk to an architect," said Sylvia. "I didn't want a multi-million dollar house and I thought that was all they did." But in talking with Ernie Ruskey of Tektonika in Stowe they quickly realized architects design smaller homes as well, and bring many value-added services to the

Local slate in a soft blue-gray covers the floor in the entryway—and elsewhere in the house. Light oak is used for the rest of the living space. Cable rail (inset) grace the stairway and porch.



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The land came with a modest chalet of no distinction. Built by a school teacher for his family's use, it had been much abused by tenants in its later years. But the Popes are good Bostonians of the "waste not, want not" school and couldn't see tearing it down. The site of the chalet at the back edge of the meadow was not optimum for solar orientation but did maximize the stunning views, and it was private. It became the starting point of the new home.



The Swedish stove separates living room from dining room, and is faced with pearl-gray soapstone. It's three levels are topped with polished dark granite. The living-room side (shown) features a fireplace and hearth. Light streams into the foyer of the main house. **Opposite:** A "window" frames the cable-rail stairwell.



PHOTO COURTESY BILL AND SYLVIA POPE



job. Ruskey was hired, with then-partner Cindy Knauf coming on board to do the landscape design.

“The most critical thing I do is the front-end stuff,” said Ruskey. “Basic orientation, solar orientation, composition of building massing and volumes. Finding spatial arrangements for a client’s particular needs. That is even more important than construction drawings.”

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For the core design, Ruskey employed the New England tradition of farmhouse with outbuildings, connected over the years by successive generations. The new main house, of Greek Revival vernacular, was placed in front of and linked to the chalet, now finished to look like an attached barn. Beyond the “barn” and linked as well is a new, two-car garage. Bill’s later life project is to upgrade the still useable interior of the chalet. This self-contained guest quarters has two bedrooms, bath, kitchen and living room with fireplace. It is, to Sylvia and Bill’s great satisfaction, totally sound-proof from the main house. ▶

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POPE HOUSE

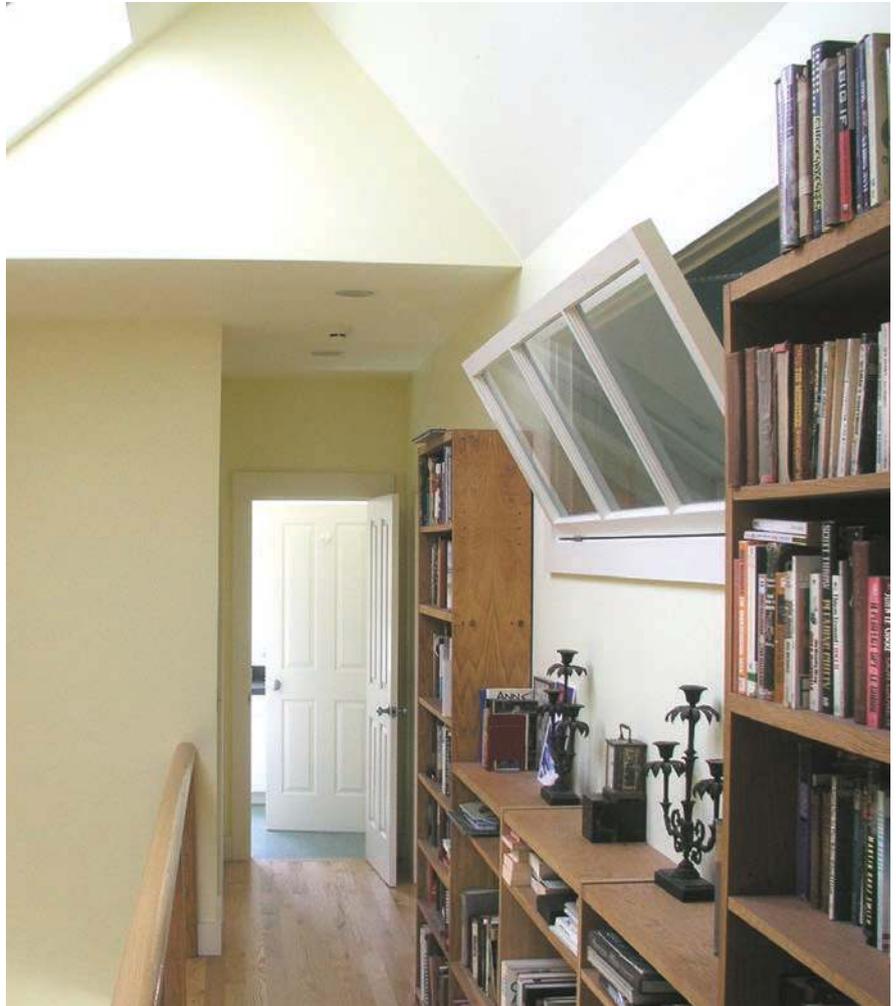
From the outside, the house is pure Greek Revival. Wide granite steps lead to a gracious entrance flanked by two white columns. Window placement is symmetrical and heavy cornice and corner boards bracket the clapboards. The family entrance along the recessed side wall is covered by a long roof, and small, square barn windows punctuate that wall to illuminate the hallway between the two structures. Large barn doors slide back to allow easy access for furniture and large items.

Builder Donny Blake of Morrisville enjoyed the process of blending old and new. Finding 14-inch-wide boards of close-grained wood for the exterior corner boards is no longer possible and so he used two boards to form the old proportions. The foundation is faced with “faux granite,” a thinner and cost-effective alternative to real stone. Inside, the floors of the entryway, mudroom and baths are of local slate in soft hues of gray and burgundy; the remainder of living space is floored in light oak. Contemporary touches of cable rail grace the stairway and porch and large skylights flood the interior with light.

The design of the Swedish stove, which separates living room from dining room, was a collaboration between Bill, Ruskey and mason Eric Nelson. Faced with luminescent pearl-gray soapstone, it features three levels capped with richly polished dark granite. On the living-room side, with fireplace, a long sweep of granite forms a hearth. It is Sylvia’s favorite perch on cold winter nights. The dining-room side houses a pizza oven where Bill bakes bread and pizza. The stove continues upstairs to form a warm wall in the master bedroom.

In the kitchen, Sylvia emphatically specified painted walls and a homey feel, not contemporary wood and chrome. It is a large, light rectangular room with plenty of space for the family to cook together while talking with those in the living and dining rooms—without seeing dirty dishes and clutter from meal preparation. A large granite-topped island forms the center.

Landscape designer Cindy Knauf, now of Montpelier, faced a tall order as



Light streams into the hall through skylights, generously sprinkled throughout the house, and small barn-like windows.

the Pope’s specified landscaping with almost no maintenance. Her solution was to organize the space around the front and family entrance with dark gray slate paths flanked by granite curbing. A large garden court of perennials and varieties of lilac that bloom through June and July screens the side entrance. On the field side of the house is a fieldstone ha-ha wall, a British idea of an earlier century that allowed sheep to graze close to the manse without being able to come right up to the door. Sylvia has no interest in raising sheep but is in love with the works of Anthony Trollope, whose books often feature estates with ha-ha walls. The total effect Knauf attained is ingenious: there is a cheerful garden that needs almost no weeding, comfortable placement of deciduous trees and evergreens to both

screen and add interest to the facade of the house, and so little lawn that it can be maintained with a few sweeps of a push mower.

The results the Popes and their designers achieved is a calm oasis the Popes rarely want to leave. On a winter day, they snap on snowshoes or skis outside their door and tramp for hours through surrounding woods and fields. Come summer, the pull of the golf course and tennis court is often overruled by their contentment in just staying home, enjoying the sight of wind waving through the hay and Mt. Mansfield rising in the distance—a sight they long enjoyed and now call home. ■