

A new living room, kitchen, and interior update give this 1950s home a modern look.



modern rustic

great design is about more than just creating pretty objects. When done right, it increases the value of a home, turns heads, and cultivates a sense of place. Making that happen in an older home isn't always easy, but Donnie Blake isn't one to back down from a challenge. As president of Donald P. Blake, Jr. Inc., in Morrisville, Vt., the upscale remodeler took on the renovation of a 1950s house in a Vermont ski town.

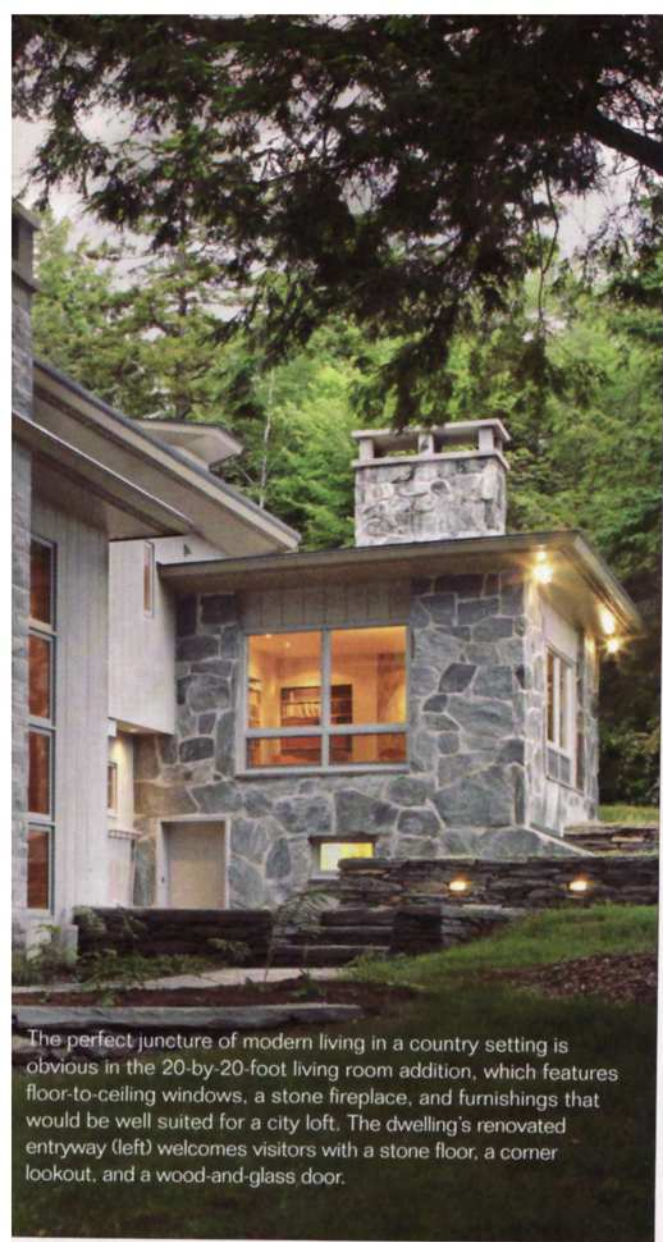
The \$750,000 job took about a year to complete, and started with a plan developed by architectural firm Cushman Design Group, of Stowe, Vt. Blake worked alongside Milford Cushman, president, and Andrew Volansky, principal architect, and the home's owner to come up with schematic drawings that would serve as the cornerstone for the trans-

formation of the creek-front house into a modern structure suited to its city-dwelling owners.

"They were looking to add space to the home and upgrade it," Cushman says. "Our goal was to do a contemporary addition onto the original fabric of the house, which was International-style architecture."

The additions were limited by budget to a new living room and a minor bump-out in the front entryway. However, the rest of the home received a complete upgrade, including the interior, with a new kitchen; the infrastructure (insulation, electrical, and flooring); as well as the exterior. The exterior update encompassed landscaping, walkways, and masonry work that includes new stone to match existing materials.

PHOTOS: CAROLYN BATES



The perfect juncture of modern living in a country setting is obvious in the 20-by-20-foot living room addition, which features floor-to-ceiling windows, a stone fireplace, and furnishings that would be well suited for a city loft. The dwelling's renovated entryway (left) welcomes visitors with a stone floor, a corner lookout, and a wood-and-glass door.



By Bridget McCrea

STRUCTURE UPDATE

The need for a major overhaul dates back several decades. Constructed of concrete block and stone, the 3,000-square-foot home that sits on 6 acres had been subject to several renovations, each of which left it with some unusual structural issues. A flat-roofed second floor with a 3-foot overhang, for example, was beginning to fold around the first floor. To keep the second floor intact, Blake says the most economical and structurally sound solution was to install new steel beams on the lower level to support the second floor.

Other challenges included an outmoded electrical system; a flat, granule roof that had seen better days; and siding and windows in need of replacement. The windows were particularly important since the owners wanted more natural light. In the 20-foot-by-20-foot living

room addition, for example, three sides of the room feature floor-to-ceiling windows with wood interiors and metal exterior frames that allow for maximum views of the outdoors. "When you sit in the living room," Blake says, "you feel like you're sitting on the land."

Those windows lend themselves to an eco-conscious lifestyle, according to Volansky. Both top and bottom windows are operable and create an environment that works well in summer as well as winter. In the winter the solar gain comes from the three-sided-glass room heating up and creating warmth, and in the summer the windows can be opened to let the cool air in below and the hot air to exhaust above. "We gave the owners the ability to operate windows in a way that maximizes passive ventilation cooling in the summertime."

During construction, the home's compact size resulted in

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Attractive drop lighting, a polished black granite countertop, stainless steel appliances, and an island sink that allows for easy meal preparation complete the home's modern kitchen (above). A stone backsplash that matches the other stone surfaces throughout the home helps create a contrast with this modern look and feel.

Thirteen-inch-wide knotty pine floorboards — installed with cut nails that mimic handmade nails — and wood-framed shelving make the home's library (formerly the home's living room) an inviting, warm place to sit and enjoy a good book (right).



the need for some on-site maneuvering. "Although the new living room looks spacious, we were dealing with very tight tolerances everywhere from the window installation to the kitchen island construction," says Blake, whose company also moved interior walls, installed beams, and hung lighting fixtures. The contractor's crew worked in cramped quarters with limited headroom — particularly in and around the multilevel spiral staircase when they finished the underside of the structure that had closed risers and treads but an open handrail, with pine cladding.

The particular qualities of the site also affected the design, according to Volansky, who incorporated views of the adjacent creek and surrounding tree canopy. "The home's surround-



ings really lent themselves to the language that we brought into the architecture," Volansky says. New floor-to-ceiling columns, for example, resemble the very tree trunks visible from various places in the living room, but particularly from the cushioned window seat.

Considering the number of designers and contractors involved with the project, Blake says it went very smoothly and was finished on time. Work was done in segments, with the finished product being a 50-plus-year-old home with all the trappings of a modern residence.

"It came together very well, despite the challenges," Blake says. "We're all happy with the result." 🍷🍷

Bridget McCrea is a freelance writer based in Dunedin, Fla.



Project Details

Project: Addition of a 400-square-foot living room, and complete interior and exterior upgrade of a 1950s house

Area: Northern Vermont ski town

Duration: One year

Cost: \$750,000

Architect: Cushman Design Group, Stowe, VT

Builder: Donald P. Blake, Jr. Inc., Morrisville, VT

Despite tight tolerances, the dining room, living room, and staircase leading to the home's other floors feel anything but cramped. A faux-candle lighting fixture hangs over the dining room table, positioned to allow diners to see outside to the stone patio and surrounding foliage

what lies beneath

Before all of the finishes in this aging ski resort home could be upgraded, some intensive "forensics" had to take place, says Cushman, who blames the building's compromised structural integrity on "many years of ill-suited renovations."

"One of our biggest challenges was learning how the building was put together and how it had been altered over the years," recalls Cushman, whose company handled much of the initial investigation. A previous contrac-

tor, for example, had installed recessed can lights by cutting through floor joists.

Such earlier alterations resulted in structural issues that needed to be addressed by the team of contractors and designers hired by the homeowner.

Tight setbacks were also a problem. "Figuring out exactly where the living room addition would go, its size, and whether it was within an allowable, conforming use of the property was a real puzzle," Cushman says.

Although solving such puzzles took time, they didn't set the project back, says Cushman, who prefers to think of the hurdles as "wonderful layers of forensic puzzling" to be worked through to arrive at an appropriate design.

"Successful design must take all these matters into consideration," Cushman says, "plus the history of the land, the quality of the original fabric of the house, its architecture, and the landscape itself." —B.M.