New England HOME

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Warm Up In Style

Chic comfort for après ski or every day

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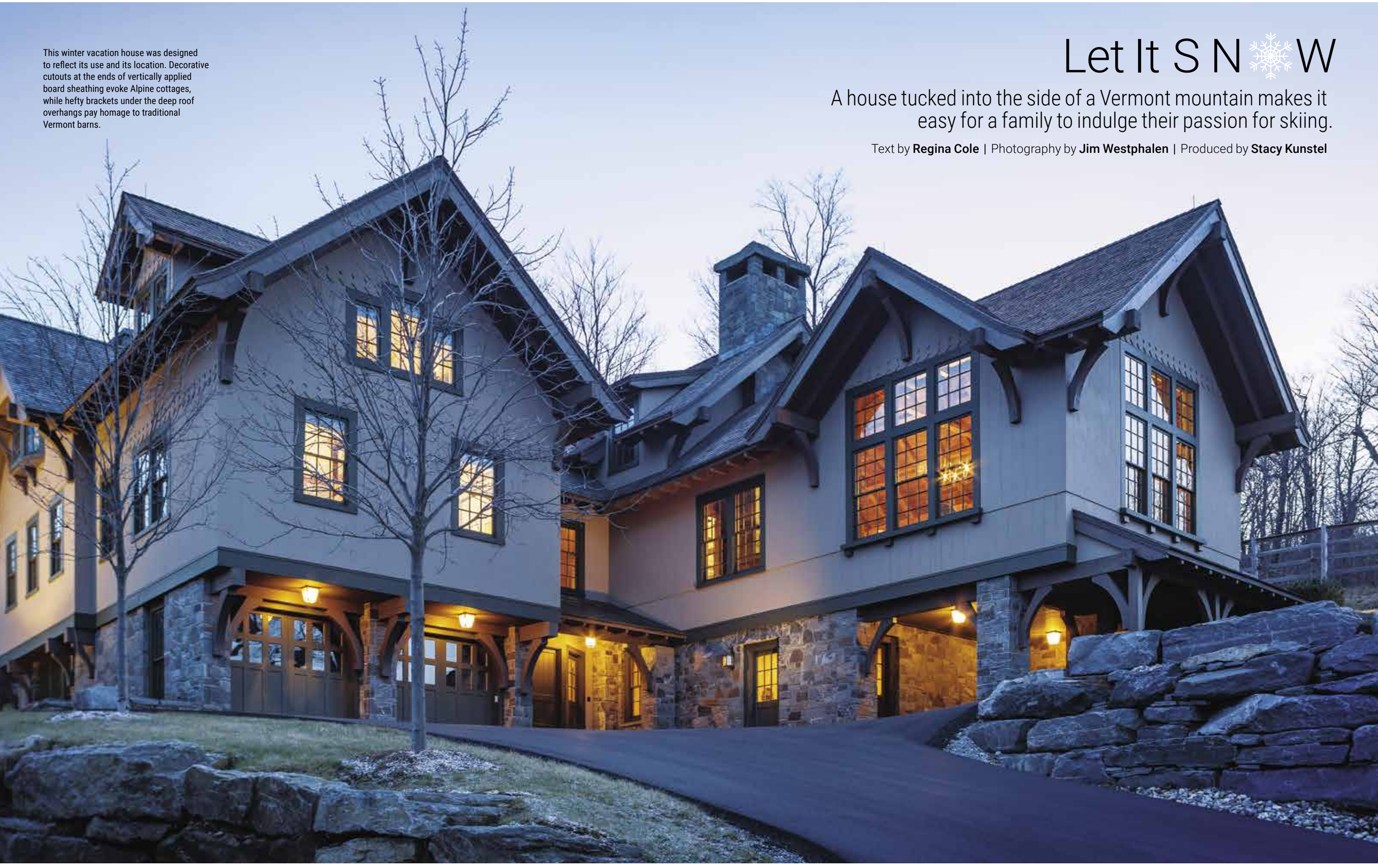
This winter vacation house was designed to reflect its use and its location. Decorative cutouts at the ends of vertically applied board sheathing evoke Alpine cottages, while hefty brackets under the deep roof overhangs pay homage to traditional Vermont barns.

Let It S N❄W

A house tucked into the side of a Vermont mountain makes it easy for a family to indulge their passion for skiing.

Text by **Regina Cole** | Photography by **Jim Westphalen** | Produced by **Stacy Kunstel**



Local Vermont granite gives considerable heft to the great room, where a double-sided fireplace rises to a soaring peak in the living room. Interior designer Denise Salomon made ample use of black metal for the lighting fixtures, fireplace accessories, small side tables and, unexpectedly, in the accents on the upholstered chairs.

"It's a big, heavy, stone room, but, at the same time, it's very transparent," says Mark Finlay. "The inside reflects the outside. You can see five different ski hills from this room."

Anyone who skis knows that getting to the mountain is the toughest part of it. The day's best skiing is early in the morning, when the trails still wear fresh, untouched snow, but being among the first on the lifts can mean driving on icy winter roads in the near dark—no fun at all.

Carolyn and Rob Brennan figured that out years ago. "We have been skiing at Stratton Mountain in Vermont for thirty-three years," Carolyn says. "When our third and youngest child committed to liking skiing, we committed to the mountain."

The Brennans, whose primary home is in Westchester, New York, sealed that commitment by buying a plot of land on the side of Stratton Mountain, 2,500 feet up. They brought in Connecticut architect Mark Finlay to help them create a 10,000-square-foot, six-bedroom family vacation home, a getaway that not only sits on their favorite mountain, but is surrounded by ski trails. When the Brennans go skiing, they schuss right out the door of the house.

"Their kids are all great skiers," the architect says. "They ski out the front door; there's a ski room right next to the main entrance. They can also ski out of the upper foyer."

That upstairs foyer is the result of what he describes as "a tricky building site. It's very steep."

The house Finlay designed nestles into the slope and honors the alpine heritage of his clients' favorite sport with its exterior detailing of vertical board sheathing subtly ornamented with decorative cutouts. The peaked roof's overhanging eaves are supported by hefty brackets, a nod to Vermont barn architecture. Extra-thick, taper-sawn cedar roof shingles ensure strength for years to come.

The U-shaped house is grounded by a central entry flanked by asymmetric wings. "The two sides of the house step up with the topography," Finlay explains. "They are organized around the central staircase. It's a complex house, but feels simple."

As construction on the house progressed, Finlay and his clients encountered some unexpected complexities. Close proximity to ski trails meant that the noise of snowmaking guns and grooming equipment, which run at night, needed to be filtered out. Finlay addressed that issue by installing extra-heavy window glass. He and the Brennans also discovered that one of the snowmaking guns sprayed snow directly into the octagonal screened porch. With window glazing and radiant heat under the stone floor, the porch became a sunny, warm, and dry winter room that turns back into a screened porch in the summer.

Denise Salomon, an interior designer based in Sag Harbor, New York, began to work with Carolyn as soon as plans were drawn up. The two are fast friends, having met years ago as designer and client. "Carolyn's taste is more on the traditional side, but

LEFT: The rustic dining table is drawn close to the fireplace, its head chairs covered with caramel leather while the side chairs wear a subtle plaid. **RIGHT:** The kitchen's attention-grabbing stone-clad wall is softened by a white tile backsplash; a heavy lintel beam is an example of the new use of old materials.

PROJECT TEAM

Architecture: Mark Finlay, Mark P. Finlay Architects

Interior design: Denise Salomon

Builder: Mike Lynn, Rocky Dell Builders

Landscape design: Steve Jones, Mettowee Mill Nursery

“The two sides of the house step up with the topography. They are organized around the central staircase. It’s a complex house, but feels simple,” says Finlay.

LEFT: The treads of the central staircase change from stone to wood as they ascend. **RIGHT:** The master bath is one of the few rooms where curtains were used, softening the windows while imparting a sense of privacy. **BELOW:** A fireplace warms the master bedroom’s sitting area.

definitely not cluttered,” Salomon says. “For this house, she wanted neutrals, not florals.”

Rob, too, got in on the fun. “As we progressed, he became increasingly interested in using local materials,” Carolyn says.

The soaring great room reflects both Carolyn’s desire for tranquility and Rob’s interest in keeping things local. Occupying the longer of the projecting wings, this is a dramatic space, where the ceiling beams and rafters rise to a lofty peak above walls lined with local granite. Three enormous black iron chandeliers illuminate a collection of comfortable furniture scaled to fit the large room and outfitted in blue-gray upholstery that echoes the color of the granite. Vast windows look out to the peaks and valleys all around. “I like to use blue grays: I think they are soothing,” says Salomon. “And Carolyn likes light and bright rooms.” To make the most of the stunning views and to enhance that brightness, Salomon decided against window treatments.

“It’s a big, heavy, stone room, but, at the same time, it’s very transparent,” Finlay says. “The inside reflects the outside. You can see five different ski hills from this room.”

A double-sided fireplace, also built of local granite, separates this gathering space from the kitchen and dining room. On the great room side, the stone climbs to meet the peak of the cathedral ceiling, while on the dining side, Finlay created a cozier atmosphere by lowering the ceiling to single-story height. As in the great room, the palette is a quiet echo of the stone, with side chairs outfitted in subtle plaid and head chairs in caramel leather surrounding a rustic wood table.

The well-used kitchen (the whole family loves to cook, Carolyn says) also sports granite-clad walls. Two stone niches flanking the stove’s white tile backsplash provide for pretty display, while above, a massive beam acts as a lintel. Like the antique reclaimed oak flooring, the beam was salvaged locally, loved for its hand-hewn marks and aged patina.

Rustic metal makes a strong design statement throughout the home—in the stools and light fixtures of the kitchen, in the clever twisted-metal accents on the great room’s upholstered chairs, and, especially, in the central hall’s stair railings. As the stairway ascends, its treads switch from stone to wood, signaling a change from the public areas below to the

warmth and privacy of bedrooms above.

Carolyn and Rob's second-floor master suite is a sanctuary of its own, with a stone fireplace anchoring a sitting area and—through the master bath—a rear patio that holds another fireplace and a spa for warming up and soothing muscles after a long day on the slopes. Here, the stone paving is heated to keep the snow at bay, and although a trail passes by just below, Carolyn says, "It feels very private. It's one of our favorite places."

Of course, in a house this well-used and well-loved, choosing just one favorite spot is no easy decision. It's a safe bet that, for this family of passionate skiers, the whole house is exactly where they belong once winter arrives NEH

RESOURCES: For more information about this home, see page 170.

ABOVE: An octagonal screened porch became a winter room with glazing and radiant heat under the floor and behind the granite wainscoting. **LEFT:** With its fireplace and hot tub, the upper level's rear patio is a favorite spot to warm up and relax sore skiing muscles. **FACING PAGE:** The patio is kept snow-free with heating under the stone pavers.