

Story by Marisa Crumb
Photos by Carolyn Bates



VERMONT HOMES AND GARDENS

A Wildlife Corridor in Town

The making of a symbiotic home and multiple gardens (and three businesses)

ONE CANNOT HELP BUT SMILE ROUNDING the corner and the slight incline to Nancy and Alan Benoit's small brick cottage. It feels like being transported to a little slice of English countryside. With its steep slate roof, climbing rose-covered arbor entrance, serpentine slate path, and an absolute abundance of flowers, grasses, and herbs, the house and the property are unlike anything else in the neighborhood. A small wooden shingle hung unpretentiously announces the couple's respective businesses: Alan is an architect and a certified passive house consultant whose specialty is affordable and energy-efficient architecture; Nancy is a designer whose bailiwick is creativity unleashed.

The Manchester Center locale is also the milieu for the couple's joint venture: an Airbnb. When tendonitis brought Nancy's at-home shoemaking business to a halt last fall, she and Alan transformed her existing studio, a wood-clad Seattle-esque structure, into a guesthouse. "The shoe studio," Alan explains, "is super-insulated and passively heated (mostly) by the sun in winter and passively cooled via shading, funneling of breezes, and large overhangs in the summer." The pitch of the overhang is the same angle that allows maximum sunlight in the winter to warm up the space as it is for the shade that is afforded from the surrounding mature, deciduous trees in the summer. There are also no windows on the north-facing side of the guesthouse; full sun in the winter saturates the room with light and heat through south-facing French doors. An ancillary source of heat comes from an electric mat under the engineered hardwood floors that uses less than half of the wattage of a hair dryer. And makes for toasty feet.

Nancy animatedly describes how she "loves small spaces" and that when decorating or incorporating design "it's all about scale." To illustrate, she points out the two nightstands that



The homeowners plant and nurture an extensive variety of bushes, plants, herbs, fruit trees, and vegetables on the property, which is a delightful avian and entomological haven.

flank the (very) comfortable-looking bed, which, yes, is perfectly suited to the size of the guest studio. The two nightstands were commissioned through Etsy and are made from recycled pallets; Nancy specified the size to best correlate with the furnishings. The couple emphasizes that it is important to them that as much as is possible, everything does double duty; it is also pivotal to their lifestyle that they assimilate reclaimed and repurposed materials. A large, live-edge, cross-cut piece of wood cantilevered from the wall and two garage-sale storage ottomans serve as a space for guests of the Airbnb—or family and friends who are visiting—to enjoy a bite to eat or the coffee and tea provided above the small refrigerator.

Nancy and Alan both characterize their style as “not minimalist” but rather a “clean, modern, rustic combination.” They are big fans of open storage in the guest studio, as closet doors and cabinets would take away from the space and make it feel smaller. Black iron pipe from the local hardware store offers a place to hang clothes, while a custom-built wooden dresser offers additional storage and a small bench accommodates luggage. The adjoining bathroom is newly repurposed (it used to be where Nancy assembled parts of her shoe construction) and is a light-filled, spotless, and uncluttered space that would make any guest feel relaxed and rejuvenated.

Speaking of uncluttered and multi-purpose, the wildlife corridor that is the nucleus of the one-acre property is “the strategy that keeps us learning” mentions Alan; it reflects and dictates the “evolution of us and our property,” Nancy adds. “The house set the tone, which uses a lot of masonry and hardscape,” says Alan. “Even in winter there is the same permanent shape to it.” Expounding on the evolving component of both themselves and the property, the couple describes how it is a process of being “in tune with where we live.” Alan explains how they have learned what survives and what doesn’t. They plant and nurture an extensive variety of vegetables, fruit trees and bushes, and herbs in gardens throughout the entire front half of this avian and entomological sanctuary.

The assorted gardens are quite the horticultural feat. The couple grows



Charlestown, NH
(603) 826-4626
www.blancbailey.com

If you can dream it, we can build it...

Renovations & Restorations
Since 1989



WE REALIZE THAT EVERY
PROJECT BEGINS FROM AN
INNATE DESIRE TO CREATE
SOMETHING GREAT.



LOEWEN WINDOW CENTER
OF VERMONT & NEW HAMPSHIRE



52 Bridge Street, White River Jct., VT 05001

800.505.1892 • 802.295.6555

info@loewenvtnh.com www.loewenvtnh.com

www.loewen.com

VISION FROM WITHIN

Loewen



Some walls were knocked down to open spaces up; the kitchen has plenty of elbow room for the cook. In the living room, big windows seem to bring the outdoors closer, and the two sofas (Alan's mother, Claire, custom-made the green afghan on the larger one) were tailor-made to fit the space.



an immense variety of both vegetables and fruit, from heirloom tomatoes, asparagus, and potatoes to raspberries, herbs, and peach and pear trees; in addition, they utilize a cold-frame system to grow lettuce all year. It's also clear that both Nancy and Alan are deeply invested in nurturing the birds, insects, and small critters that regularly visit the lush, healthy foliage. The roof of the shoe studio next to the vegetable garden collects rainwater, which is gathered in a trough, and is used to water the gardens. The trough also serves as a bathing place for neighborhood birds that also benefit from the nearby bushes where they feed the berries to their young.

A grassy area to the side of the house that connects the front yard to the backyard opens up to a private, level spot. Two more outbuildings round out the property and are a further example of how their home is an impetus to adapt to change and how it helps them—Nancy refers to it as an “evolution of our character and our travels.” The couple built the barn after purchasing the house and used recycled slate for the roof. Originally a space to host “barn dinners,” which they did for three years, they have now emptied out the barn and are in the process of redesigning the barn for their shared work studio. Alan describes its future style as “modern with a hint of Vermont vernacular.” And they both emphasize this as an opportunity to make everything work...again, the double-duty aspect. As a complement to the work/office space, the barn will also be the site for client meetings and conferences. A small, prairie-style shed—a nod to Frank Lloyd Wright—contains tools and lawn equipment.

Sharing space in what Nancy and Alan consider an outdoor living room and dining room (they have many meals and enjoy quiet downtime in the warmer months here)—among the aggregate herbs and flowers—is a haven for beneficial insects and pollinators. In line with the couple's tenet to “let the wildlife use it,” they place significant value on nurturing and establishing a place where the natural world can flourish undisturbed. Even the mason bees, which use mortar-like mud to seal up the cells where they lay their eggs between the bricks in the house, are left uninterrupted to carry on their life cycle. Insects that scurry amid the gravel paths around the recycled



GEOBARNs
Vermont Craftsmanship since 1991

603.359.1912 / geobarns.com



BARTLETT.

BECAUSE CUSTOMER SERVICE,
JUST LIKE TREES, SHOULD BE
A BREATH OF FRESH AIR.



**BARTLETT
TREE EXPERTS**

SCIENTIFIC TREE CARE SINCE 1907

For the life of your trees.

PRUNING FERTILIZATION PEST & DISEASE MANAGEMENT REMOVAL
CALL 877 BARTLETT 877.227.8538 OR VISIT BARTLETT.COM

VERMONT

m a g a z i n e

Vermonters, Our Places & Our History

SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION

Change of address:

To ensure continuous service, please notify us 6 to 8 weeks prior to your move. E-mail, call, or write us at the address below.

Snowbird/alternate address?

Let us know your alternate address and when you'll be there and we'll make sure you don't miss an issue.

Gift subscriptions:

Gift subscriptions can be ordered through our website, by calling us, or by mail using the bind-in card found in this magazine.

Mail: Vermont Magazine
P.O. Box 900
Arlington, VT 05250

(802) 375-1366
subscriberservices@vermontmagazine.com



The barn, which the Benoits built after buying the house, as it appeared when they used it to host their “barn dinners.” It is now being converted into studio space. Recycled components, such as the roof slates, figured into the original construction.



slate pavers (crushed slate is also used as mulch) are treated as respected residents—all insects are viewed as favorable and intrinsic in this protected habitat. Of special note is the apple espalier (the horticultural art of pruning and training a fruit tree to grow flat on one plane) thriving on the side of the house, yet another example of the harmonious interaction in this concentrated space.

It was surprising to learn that the house is only 800 square feet; the arrangement and colors of the adjoining rooms gives a sense of linear flow. When the Benoits first moved in 16 years ago, they took down walls to open up the cramped, tight rooms. Built in the 1950s, they also needed to insulate; dense-pack cellulose now fills the once-empty wall cavities. Heart pine floors were exposed and restored; “it’s a recycled house,” Nancy says, and it is evident that maintaining and appreciating the original details is important. The muted gray walls with white trim add to the airy impression and each room flows gracefully from one to the next. The kitchen is efficient and well laid out; every area functions comfortably and equip-



Upstairs in the 800-square-foot house, while space is at a premium, the homeowners have made the most of it. The bathroom in the guesthouse (below) has almost a retro-look that mimics that of the house's 1950s design.





The guesthouse, nestled in the gardens, was originally the Benoits' studio and built with energy efficiency in mind; windows on the south side encourage passive solar during winter and large roof overhangs keep things cool in the summer.



Lots of comforts and amenities are packed into this small space that awaits friends and family staying over or Airbnb guests. The homeowners' expertise in the fields of architecture and design are reflected throughout this renovated, former studio space.



ment is convenient. "I love home! I love to cook!" exclaims Nancy, "and everything is special to me in here. I wouldn't change a thing in the kitchen."

Off the clean, contemporary kitchen via a short hallway and past a small, unadorned half bath is the neat-as-a-pin, unadulterated dining room. The dining table and chairs are the main focus, and they fill that role with a simple elegance. Reiterating the importance of scale in a small space, Nancy calls attention to the modest Danish cabinet and mirror, an ideally scaled piece of furniture that holds everyday dishes, and to the narrow almost-floor-to-ceiling shelves that hold drinking glasses. At the front of the house is the (also) clean, inviting living room. Stone sculptures that Alan carved hold court alongside vintage furniture, mid-century modern pieces, artwork, and flowers cut from the couple's gardens. A working gas fireplace displays sentimental objects on the painted brick mantel and adds to the cozy ambience.

When asked how they go about meshing found objects, heirloom pieces, and modern curated acquisitions, Nancy didn't miss a beat. "Be patient; never settle if it's not right." Check, check, and check on getting it right. 📌

Marisa Crumb enjoys hiking, kayaking, and chocolate in southern Vermont. Carolyn Bates is a professional photographer who lives and works in Burlington, VT. To see more of her work, visit carolynbates.com.

JUST THE FACTS

Roaring Brook Furniture

60 South Main Street
Wallingford, VT 05773
Call (802) 446-3255 or
visit roaringbrookfurniture.com.

r.k. Miles

618 Depot Street
Manchester Center, VT 05255
Call (802) 362-1952 or visit
rkmiles.com/manchester-vt.

Manchester Woodcraft

175 Depot Street
Manchester Center, VT 05255
Call (802) 362-5770 or visit
manchesterwoodcraft.com.