

SHELTER

## Stowe Away

The best way to make a new Vermont ski house feel lived-in? A Boston couple spends every spare second there—and so do all their friends. ♦ By Molly Walsh

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**HEN ELAINE AND DAVID ZAHARRIS** decided to build a ski house in Stowe, Vt., their architectural designer told them to make a list: must-haves, like-to-haves and things they could live without. Elaine's ran on for several pages, with must-haves including window seats, a screened-in porch and a soaking tub. David's list was short: He



**Location** Stowe, Vt. **Closest skiing** Stowe, a 10-minute drive away. Mad River Glen, Smugglers' Notch, Bolton Valley and Sugarbush are within an hour's drive. **Size** Three bedroom, three-and-a-half bath **Square footage** 4,900 **Lot size** 1.4 acres **Architectural designer** Heidi Arnold **Builder** Brendan O'Reilly of

Gristmill Builders in Stowe **Design strategy** Because the home's site is a steep meadow, most architects would design a narrow, vertical home. Arnold, on the other hand, wanted a low-profile, two-story home, which she achieved by tucking it 17 feet into the hillside and stacking it down the slope.

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wanted two dishwashers in the kitchen. (As a couple, they love to entertain, and you can guess who does the dishes.)

Needless to say, David, who's in the mortgage business in Boston, got his wish. Elaine got most of hers, as well, including a soaking tub with westerly views of Mt. Mansfield. Builders finished the 4,900-square-foot house in late 2004, and since then Elaine and David have made the three-hour trip up from their primary Boston home every weekend and vacation day they get.

Up two miles of steep, winding road, the country mountain house sits next to an icy brook and looks across a narrow valley to Vermont's highest peak and the steep trails of Stowe that wind down it. When Elaine, coordinator of a clinical

**LOW PROFILE** Previous pages: The home is surrounded by acres of forest, and it overlooks Stowe's fabled Front Four—black-diamond trails that wind down the face of Mt. Mansfield, Vermont's highest peak. The garage is sided with reclaimed barn board, which makes the new home look like it's an addition to a historic structure. Rusted-steel eaves pick up the antique theme and unify the structures. This page: The open and comfortably casual dining and living room are flooded with sunlight; the huge windows allow the Zaharises to watch the lifts start humming over their morning coffee. Cozy couches facing cushioned window seats create a "conversation square," perfect for socializing. Opposite: David shovels some of Stowe's 250-plus annual inches of snow—some of the best in the East—from the entryway deck. The staircase, punctuated by an antique Victorian newel post, is a favorite napping spot for Sophie, the couple's black Russian terrier. Elaine arranges tulips—no doubt a centerpiece for another one of their famous dinner parties—in their bright and airy kitchen.

research trial at a Boston hospital, surveys these hills from her home, she's reminded of *The Sound of Music*, and not just because of the idyllic setting: Stowe was real-life Maria von Trapp's adopted hometown in the 1940s. "David keeps telling me, 'OK, you can pretend to be Maria, just don't sing too loudly,'" Elaine says with a laugh.

Forest encircles the 1.4-acre lot, and stone walls edge the garden beds. The three-car garage is finished in salvaged barn board and fitted with metal goose-neck lights. When you walk in the entryway, which opens into a great room with a vaulted ceiling and a 30-ton stone fireplace, your eyes immediately go to the wall of windows that frames the

view of Stowe's infamous Front Four, some of the best and toughest black-diamond runs in the state.

The couple, now in their early 50s, rediscovered skiing after a long hiatus a few years ago when David reconnected with a childhood friend who owned a ski house at Stowe. When David and Elaine visited him there, they got back on skis and soon found themselves building their own vacation home right up the

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road. Now, the couple loves waking up on snowy Saturdays and driving 10 minutes to the lifts, often with friends and houseguests in tow. Elaine, who didn't ski much growing up, usually sticks to the intermediate trails on the Spruce side of Stowe with her girlfriends and sometimes takes a lesson. David's an advanced skier, and he and his buddies like to push themselves a little harder. "The guys like to go early-early, the girls a little later," Elaine says.

As Elaine speaks from the plump sofa across from the fireplace, the couple's black Russian terrier, Sophie, plops down on a thick rug. Light streams in, illuminating putty-colored walls, wine-colored upholstery and hardwood floors. On the western wall, a window seat built into a small bay is flanked by two leaded-glass windows salvaged from a Philadelphia church.

Indeed, salvaged architectural elements from old buildings are tucked into almost every room: The backsplash behind the bar in the corner of the dining area is a hunk of old tin ceiling; a Victorian newel post anchors the gleaming wooden stairs; and vintage glass cupboard fronts blend in beautifully with new cupboards, painted cream and charcoal and sanded for an antique effect. "Our builder and our architect did this kind of treasure hunting for us," Elaine says.





**EVERYTHING IS ILLUMINATED** This page: Natural light is the key element throughout the home, giving a very warm and open ambience to even the smallest spaces. In one of the upstairs guest bedrooms, the couple and their architectural designer kept things simple—allowing the views of the slopes to take center stage. The Zaharrisés painted the powder room a rich red, and topped the vanity with a glass-bowl sink and farmhouse-style faucet that are both modern and Old World in feel. Opposite: The bar area in the great room is a cozy space, replete with leather chairs and rich wood. The backsplash behind the sink is made from old pressed tin, salvaged and restored by builder Brendan O'Reilly and his crew. O'Reilly and architectural designer Heidi Arnold also incorporated salvaged doors, windows, balusters and cupboard fronts into the house, and the Zaharrisés, too, did their fair share of treasure hunting. The result is a new home with the texture and character of an old one, minus the sagging porches and rotting window sills.

Architectural designer Heidi Arnold and builder Brendan O'Reilly of Gristmill Builders in Stowe made repeat visits to Architectural Salvage Warehouse on Burlington's Main Street and to Mason Brothers, another salvage house just outside Burlington in Essex Junction. While O'Reilly's construction crew now enjoys the challenge of repairing, refinishing

and building the old into the new, they didn't initially share O'Reilly's imagination. "They used to say, 'Oh God, here comes Sanford again, pulling in with his pile of trash,'" laughs O'Reilly.

He and Arnold purchased their finds early on in the construction of the Zaharris's house so that the Gristmill team of carpenters had ample time and



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space to customize. "It wasn't too difficult. It just all fell together really nicely—finding pieces here or there," says Arnold, who was formerly based in Stowe and now works primarily out of St. John in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

The old, well-crafted details are all the more delightful because they're juxtaposed against touches that break from tradition. A wall pops up in daring plum or lacquered red; the delicate glass-bowl sink in the powder room sits atop a rough-hewn barn-board vanity. The kitchen, which flows off the great room in a cozy, rectangular shape, is a perfect example of the couple's successful mix-and-match strategy of old with new. The antique cupboard fronts are paired with polished, garnet-flecked granite countertops and pink bell-shaped hand-blown glass lamps suspended from the ceiling. Beyond the island and stools, a weathered wooden kitchen table provides more seating and an additional hangout zone for guests who like to gather and help with the cooking.

Often there's a crowd on the weekend—nieces, siblings, in-laws, friends and

friends' children. David and Elaine grew up attending the same church in the Boston area and went to high school prom together. They're both second-generation Greek Americans, married 27 years, and they wanted the house to be a place to share with family and friends. The visiting hordes can sometimes be a bit much, David admits. "But then we call and say, 'You're coming, aren't you?'"

Next to the kitchen, a hallway leads to the powder room, porch and master suite that again showcases Stowe's slopes, as well as a handsome dresser that Elaine found at the Brimfield Antique Show, which takes place outside Boston. The house is full of scandalously

low-priced Brimfield finds—end tables for \$20, bureaus for \$50.

Opposite the kitchen is the staircase to the second and top floor, which makes this home somewhat of a rarity among new ski-town constructions. "I was very conscious of not having this house jump out at you, not having it be an eyesore," says Arnold. O'Reilly also wanted to avoid a king-of-the-mountain house that overpowered the landscape. But because the site is a steep meadow, building a home with a low profile proved to be a design challenge. After snowshoeing around the lot and studying the angles, Arnold decided to tuck the house deep into the hill—17 feet in—and stack it

down the slope.

At the top of the stairs, a loft overlooks the great room on one side, and on the other a hallway is fitted with a long window seat that opens for storage. The two guest bedrooms and baths comprise this floor, along with a study for David that leads onto a deck. On weekends, after skiing with his buddies at Stowe in the morning and landing at the Matterhorn, a local watering hole, in the afternoon, he heads home, steps onto the deck, lights a cigar and watches the mountain close down for the day.

"We had a lot of fun doing this," David says about the construction. "And we love being up here." ♦

