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REMOTE cabin is a GREEN GEM

STORY BY FRAN SIGURDSSON
PHOTOS BY SUSAN TEARE

An adventurous family keeps it simple, secluded and energy efficient at their minimalist cabin in Vermont's Green Mountains

OVER THE RIVER AND THROUGH THE WOODS lies a cozy New England hideaway. During the winter, owners Eric and Phiona Milano traverse Vermont's deep and drifted snow to get there, accompanied by their little boy, Franco. The journey takes about an hour from their home on Lake Champlain in Burlington, Vt., to the northern tip of

the Green Mountain National Forest. Only instead of a horse-drawn sleigh, the Milanos load provisions for their stay onto a horsepowered one.

There is no paved access to the cabin. The nearest road ends a mile away, then becomes a snowmobile trail – part of a statewide system known as VAST (see “Get Outside in Vermont,” p. 51). So the Milanos park the car in the trail lot, walk across a pedestrian bridge, and up a steep path to the cabin. While Phiona and Franco settle in, Eric retrieves his snowmobile and sled, returning by a different route with the gear.

Simple adventure

The remote access to the cabin suits this adventurous 30-something couple. “We didn’t want vehicles or a driveway,” says Eric. As a college student in Burlington, he often hiked to a nearby primitive campsite on the New Haven River. “Great trout fishing,” recalls the New York City native. On one outing, Eric noticed a “For Sale” sign. He purchased 14 acres that straddled the river, with a view of the Green Mountains and Mount Abraham – a high peak in Vermont.

After Eric married fellow student Phiona and Franco was born, the couple

decided to build. To keep their getaway secluded, Eric chose a site on the far side of the river. Toward the end of 2008, he consulted Bristol, Vt., architect Joan Heaton PC, design in hand. The original concept came from the Yestermorrow School, a design/build school in Waitsfield, Vt., that teaches sustainable design, green building and more. “I took a carpentry class, then a design class,” says Eric. “It helped me lay out land on paper, figure out where I wanted the trail, and where to site the cabin.”

Remote-site challenges

Even though this cabin was a small project, it posed big challenges. For

NO ROADS – The cabin and bridge (above) are not visible from the road. Electric wiring for the cabin runs in conduit piping hidden on the underside of the bridge.



CREATURE COMFORTS – Kitchen cabinets made by the builders have a milk-paint finish. An antique hutch with similar coloring is from Vermont Salvage. The sink and countertops are soapstone, a Vermont product.

AN OPEN, AIRY LAYOUT AND HIGH CEILINGS MAKE THE RETREAT SEEM LARGER THAN 600 SQUARE FEET

starters, how does one get construction materials to a site with no vehicular access?

Heaton crossed that hurdle with a 75-foot-long pedestrian bridge. Made in the Midwest, the single-span steel bridge was delivered in one piece by truck and lowered by crane onto poured concrete and steel abutments.

All supplies had to be hauled across by foot. "Everything was dictated by the site," says Heaton. "The remoteness influenced design choices and materials. We used as many local materials as possible."

Keeping it green

Cost was another concern. The crew needed to keep within a tight budget, half of which went to site development: power, septic, a dug well. Eric

MINIMALIST DESIGN

"I LOVE CABINS," says architect Joan Heaton. "They have the bare essentials – everything you need." Here are some tips from Heaton for creating a small getaway of your own:

- Take advantage of light from all sides. Often in a small cabin, light from windows placed on the north, east, south and west sides can reach the main space because there are so few interior partitions.
- Plan for storage and a mechanical room. A closet and built-ins can help keep clutter at bay so main spaces look neat and clean.
- Include outdoor living spaces. Covered porches, decks and patios help a small footprint live large.
- Use the roof shape to add character. Cathedral ceilings feel spacious, while dormers create cozy nooks.

REUSED TREASURES –
The hardwood flooring is reclaimed wood from a barn in Vermont. The spiral staircase leading to the sleeping loft is also a salvage find.



ENERGY EFFICIENT – Pine walls and ceilings all have high R-values. Marvin Integrity windows are double glazed.

also wanted the cabin to be energy efficient and well insulated. "I plan to keep it for a long time," he says.

Silver Maple Construction of Bristol, Vt., was chosen as the builder for the project, given the expertise of principals Sean Flynn and Mike Steele have with rugged terrain and because of their commitment to sustainability.

The cabin sits on piers, as there was no access for a cement truck to pour a foundation. Sited for passive solar heating, floor-to-ceiling windows admit light and views. An open, airy layout and high ceilings make the retreat seem larger than 600 square feet.

The mudroom entry leads into a living, kitchen and dining area, with a bathroom and Franco's little bedroom to the side. The couple's sleeping loft is above the entry.

Most interior furnishings were found at local salvage yards. The reclaimed treasures include doors, a spiral staircase, knobs, hinges and a cool claw-foot tub. "That's for me," laughs Phiona. "While Eric could live out in the woods, I'm not as rugged. I love the outdoors," says this Seattle native, "but I also love creature comforts."

Actively unwinding

Completed in the fall of 2009, the cabin has quickly become a year-round retreat. The region's extensive ski- and hiking-trail systems are a favorite source of fresh-air fun. After a day's outing, the Milanos unwind with board games and



WASHING UP – A metal wash basin bearing the "Ideal" logo was converted into the bathroom vanity. All of the plumbing fixtures in the cabin are water-conserving.

s'mores over a bonfire. They enjoy hearing the sound of rushing water while they relax on the back deck, high above the stony New Haven River. Both Phiona and Eric love to cook as well, whether on the barbeque or indoors.

Often, they are joined by relatives or friends with children Franco's age. Other times, when Eric's not managing his motorbike-tour company, MotoVermont, he invites buddies (Franco included) for a camp and fish weekend.

When Eric and Franco are outside exploring, Phiona relaxes with a knitting or sewing project. (She owns Nido, a fabric and yarn shop in Burlington.)

"The cabin was built to suit the needs of the whole family," says Phiona. "There's space for us to do the things we each enjoy." ■

Fran Sigurdsson enjoys glimpses of Vermont's Green Mountains to the east of her lakeside Adirondack home.

GET OUTSIDE IN VERMONT

WHETHER YOU'RE exploring the Green Mountain State this winter by snowshoe, snowmobile or cross-country skis, there's a trail for you:

- **The Vermont Association of Snow Travelers (VAST)**, together with local clubs, maintains a network of over 5000 miles of snowmobile trails that criss-cross the state, www.vtvast.org
- Cross-country ski the length of Vermont on the 300-mile-long **Catamount trail**, www.catamounttrail.org
- Vermont's 273-mile **Long Trail** follows the main ridge of the Green Mountains from the Massachusetts-Vermont line to the Canadian border. The oldest long-distance trail in the U.S., the Long Trail was the inspiration for the Appalachian Trail. Parts of it are accessible for winter snowshoeing, www.greenmountainclub.org



DESIGN RESOURCES

- **Architect:** Joan Heaton, Joan Heaton Architects, Bristol, Vt., www.joanheatonarchitects.com
- **General Contractor:** Silver Maple Construction, Bristol, Vt., www.silvermapleconstruction.com
- **Bridge:** Contech Engineered Solutions, www.conteches.com
- **Salvage Yards:** Mason Brothers Architectural Salvage Warehouse, Essex Junction, Vt., www.greatsalvage.com; Vermont Salvage, White River Junction, Vt., www.vermontsalvage.com
- **Windows:** Marvin Integrity, www.integritywindows.com