

BY DEBRA JUDGE SILBER

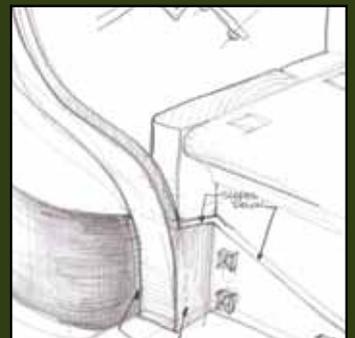
Drawn to Detail

Designed on the fly,
a master collaboration
between architect and builder
produces a one-of-a-kind remodel

Initially, renovations to the four-bedroom house perched over Lake Champlain were supposed to be confined to the kitchen. But architect Gregory “Gregor” Masefield Jr. could see early on that this house needed more. It needed to open up, connect to the landscape, and take advantage of its lake views—none of which its built-on-spec floor plan allowed. What’s more, with three sons grown or in college, the couple who lived there no longer needed lots of separate spaces. “It was way too compartmentalized, and it just didn’t work for the way they lived anymore,” Masefield said.

“We started out with some concepts—A, B, and C—and each one was progressively more encompassing of the larger issue at hand, taking more walls down and opening up more space,” he said. After opening up the living room, the project expanded to encompass the foyer and entry,

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PICTURES focus a project



Contractor Sean Flynn refers to it jokingly as “Gregor’s pretty-picture phase,” but he seriously credits Masfield’s liberal use of visuals with helping everyone involved in the project to be able to see where it was going and to take part in its evolution.

Masfield starts out with freehand sketches that help him to visualize the space, which he often colors and presents to clients. “They get a client’s mind’s eye into the experience of the project,” he said.

The pictures serve both to engage the clients’ thoughts and answer their questions. “They’ll ask something like, ‘What do you mean it will visually connect to the living room?’ And I’ll draw a picture right there on the spot. Or I’ll take



back a mandate, like: ‘We want the porch to say something about the house being inviting.’ I’ll take that away with me and come up with a couple of these, splash them with color, and present them.”

Masfield does his share of computer-generated models as well, but finds that clients respond differently to hand-drawn images. “A lot of clients respond a lot better to images that are drawn by hand than computer models,” he said. “Somehow, [hand-drawing] expresses a fact that it’s an idea; people look at an image from a computer and think it’s not changeable.”



Before

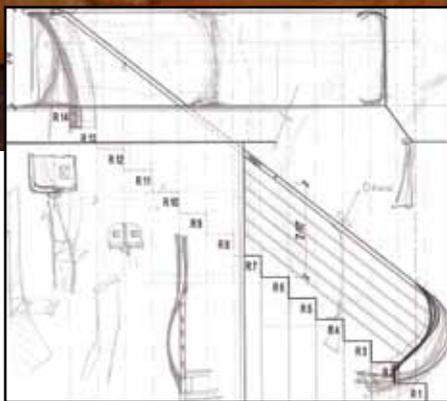


As an adjunct to the drawings, Masefield rings his plans with small photographs of products and materials that he calls "targets" or "precedents" (top). They aren't necessarily items he wants his clients to purchase; rather, they serve to represent a texture, color, or style he wants to evoke. "If I'm thinking of things that I want [the client] to latch on to, I put a precedent image out there," he explained. "A 'for-instance' type image does a lot more work than a hand sketch in this case." Still, sketches were used to communicate ideas to cabinetmaker Stark Mountain Woodworking (below).





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To create the railing, Flynn made a 20-ft. wood template that was used by blacksmith James Fecteau (huntingtonriversmithy.com) to capture the curve and run. For the floor, planks were half-lapped to create the weave illusion, then filled with slates set on backerboard.

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and the master suite upstairs.

It became, in fact, a remodel on a roll. “There were times we were framing walls when the plans were arriving,” said contractor Sean Flynn. But, he added, “Gregor did a great job keeping up with the pace.”

If Masefield was the visionary on this project, Flynn, of Silver Maple Construction of Bristol, Vt., was the one who tempered Masefield’s ideas into reality. After a general discussion with the homeowners, Masefield would sketch out his ideas—what Flynn refers to as Masefield’s “pretty-picture phase” (sidebar, p. 76). With the owners on board,

the two would hash over the plans. “Sean might say, ‘I don’t want to see a fastener. Can we do it with a spline?’” Masefield said. “We’d go back and forth with that process, and usually we’d find ourselves at an interesting detail that fortified the concept with more life than what we started with.”

Cues from the kitchen

The transformation began in the kitchen both literally and conceptually. Before the remodel, the owners had purchased some rustic kitchen stools with backs made from old pitchforks. Their composition set Masefield on the path of combining metal and

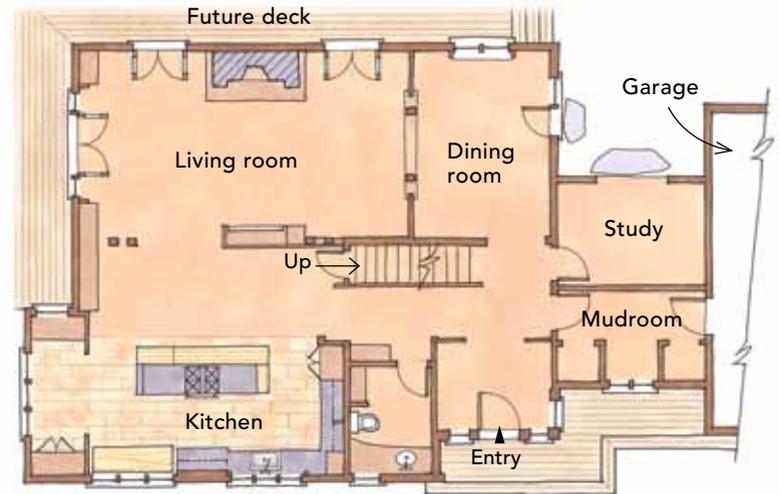


IMPROVING VIEWS, IN AND OUT

“Boxes within a bigger box” is how architect Gregory Masefield Jr. (studio3architecture.net) described the existing layout of the home in Charlotte, Vt. Masefield combined the kitchen and dining room into one large area and shifted the larger living space alongside it, opening the entire area; the spaciousness is further enhanced by replacing windows with French doors and repositioning the fireplace as a focal point on the long exterior wall. Outside, an old porch was replaced with a welcoming fir-clad alcove that draws guests to the front door.



First floor before



First floor after

0 2 4 8 ft.

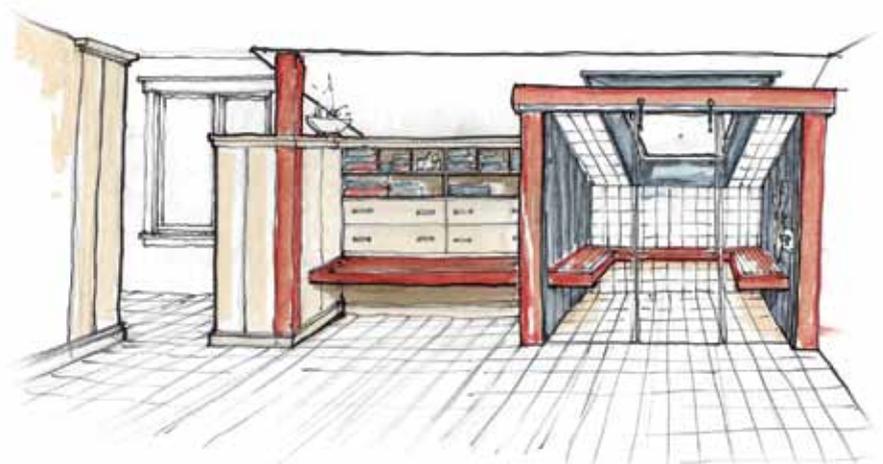
wood elements that figure in the kitchen-island supports as well as the stair railing in the entryway. While the new floor plan left the stairs and the entry in their original location, their character would change dramatically with a sweeping iron railing and a “woven” wood floor with slate inlays.

Another fundamental design element that got its start in the kitchen is the built-up

window casing, which, paired with a unique ceiling valance, carries throughout the main floor. The layered frames serve to draw added attention to outdoor views that were previously ignored. “The main idea was to really connect to the exterior,” Masefield explained. “The house is in a pretty dramatic setting, and these ended up being deep, cof-fered portals to the outside.”

Drawing visitors in is a redesigned entry porch executed in golden Douglas fir and sheltered by a cantilevered roof. “It’s warm and inviting,” Masefield said. “And I do think it says, ‘This is your entry; this is where you want to be.’” □

Debra Silber is managing editor. Photos by Susan Teare, except where noted.



Upstairs, Masefield reconfigured the old-style master bedroom and bath into a full master suite with a sitting room, a walk-through closet, and a curbless shower ringed with an ipé bench. Openness was the goal, accessibility the bonus in the shower’s design.