



# Better by Design

Bensonwood turns one couple's ideas into their ideal home.

STEVE AND JENN SARGENT didn't want a big home, they wanted a right-sized home that would take advantage of their incredible west-facing views of the Vermont mountains.

The Sargents were sure from the start that they wanted to design and build their own home. "We didn't want a company that would show us houses they had built before so they could get it close to what we were looking for," Jenn said.

"We actually started with a sketch on a napkin," said Steve, when asked how they went about creating their dream home. "From there we went to graph paper."

When they brought their rough sketches to Bensonwood for their first meeting with architect Randall Walter, they felt a little unsure of what Jenn called their "amateurish" drawing. "I was a little



intimidated, but they were really open and great about it," Jenn said. "They actually saw it as a really necessary piece of the puzzle that helped them generate lots of ideas right from the start." Over the course of several

meetings, the designers at Bensonwood began to refine the structure of the Sargent's home. "They would show us the designs on screen and let us actually 'walk through' our house," Jenn said. "3-D modeling let us move walls, put them in and take them out,



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"Steve explained. For example, the Sargents wanted a small downstairs TV room. "It was originally on one side of the stairs," said Chris Adams, a designer at Bensonwood. After moving it to the other side of the stairs, Chris showed the revision to the Sargents in 3-D. "I think that's when we all realized that [space] was where it belonged," Chris said.

Because Bensonwood architectural services are priced by the square foot instead of by the hour, the Sargents were able to focus on their design and its relationship to the cost of building in a very direct and immediate way. "We refined the design two or three times to bring it in line with our budget to build," Steve said. "It was pretty quick and painless."

Some unique features of the Sargent's house include an outdoor

fireplace on the deck and a mail-sorting center in the entry hall. "The outdoor fireplace and its chase are sited into the indoor fireplace and chimney in the great room to save space," Chris explained. The mail-sorting center consists of an opening between the wall separating the entry hall and the home office. Cubbies in the opening allow the mail to be sorted. "We're both professionals, so we get a lot of mail," Steve said. "We simply sort through mail and faxes and throw junk mail in a recycling bin in the hall. Everything else is put in the cubbies and is waiting for us in the office on the other side."

A through-the-wall mail sorting station may be a small touch, but when you open up the lines of communications between designer and homeowner, the big and small features come together in a well-designed home. "The people at Bensonwood got really excited and that made us excited!" said Jenn. "It was great because we knew *our* decisions would drive the process, not someone else's."

A PICTURE OF THE VIEW TO THE WEST OR A VERTICAL OF THE EXTERIOR

## INSIDE BENSONWOOD

### Kevin Bittenbender

IGREW UP in North Orange, Massachusetts, where my folks were weekend farmers and my high school years were filled with splitting wood, shearing sheep, making maple syrup and renovating our old house and barn with my dad.

In 1986 I enrolled at Middlebury College, minoring in Physics, Math and Chemistry before settling on Economics. Outside of class I sang in an all-male *à capella* group and skied as much as possible. After graduating I decided to take a year off to ski. I refer to this time as "working on my MBA—Masters in Big Air." One year turned into four; I spent winters in Colorado working at Breckenridge Ski School and I ran my own house-painting business back East in the summers.

In Colorado two things happened that shaped my future: I met Peggy, a fellow ski bum, and Glen, a builder. Hired just to clear a house lot, Glen realized that I was willing to learn and had a good work ethic—scarce in a ski town. He taught me everything from pouring concrete foundations to building cabinets. Glen gave me a real passion for homebuilding.

Eventually, Peggy and I moved back to North Orange, where I worked as a general contractor. We got married, hitchhiking through Europe for three months on our honeymoon. We agreed that, upon returning, we would settle wherever the first one found a job. Having heard good stories about Benson Woodworking from a college friend, I drove

up to Alstead Center one day to drop off a résumé. Four interviews and two volleyball games later, I was offered a temporary job working on a pedestrian bridge for the Montshire Museum. Temporary became full time. I joined the Woodworking Shop, thus doubling its staff.

Six of us now work in the "old shop" on Pratt Road in Alstead and we're growing every year. We make custom doors, trim, stairs and other fine architectural millwork. I've taken on the role of a company steward, as well as steering our company toward adopting Lean Principles of Manufacturing.

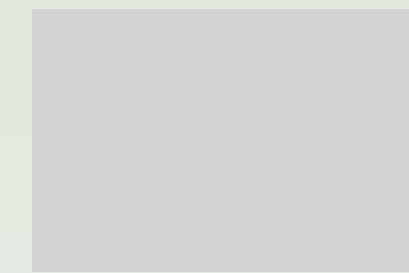
We now live in rural Alstead, where we've renovated a 250-year-old post-and-beam cape. Peggy, formerly a city girl, and our three children, Gus, Bea and Georgia, love it here on our dirt road.

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### Plug & Play Plumbing

It is common knowledge that once the majority of a house is built, subcontractors install plumbing, electrical, heating, air conditioning, bathroom fixtures and a host of other items. But who goes first? If the plumber runs pipe where the heating contractor wants to run duct, well, that's the heating guy's problem if he showed up after the plumber. Even with a diligent GC on the job, subs often work at cross-purposes simply because there is very little detailed planning and coordination.

To better organize the installation of the mechanical systems in a home, Bensonwood is creating a facility that will prefabricate bathroom and mechanical modules, along with other units. Following our Open-Built™ principles, these components will be designed in meticulous detail using Bensonwood's CAD/CAM system.



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### Riding for Cures

Thirty-five bikers and walkers from Bensonwood participated in the 26th Annual Prouty Century Ride and Challenge Walk, raising \$11,000 for the Norris Cotton Cancer Center at Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center. The 100-mile event, which was attended by 35,000 people, raised a total of \$1.7 million. The money will be used to fund patient services, clinical trials and research. "It took most of us about six hours to ride the entire one hundred miles in perfect weather," said Allison Smeltz, an interior designer with Bensonwood.

### Bensonwood Blitz Build

Bensonwood recently worked with Monadnock Habitat for Humanity to complete a 2,100 square-foot home in Alstead, New Hampshire for the Oberst family. Working with more than fifty businesses and 450 people, this community effort was led by Tedd Benson. Amazingly, the home was completed in only eight days. One reason for the extremely short build time was because many of the home's components were pre-built at Bensonwood's facilities.