

Leach Construction of Vermont, LLC

The Complete Package

By Stephanie Nelson

When you hire Leach Construction of Vermont for your new home or remodeling project, you don't just get a builder. You get a company that combines planning and design at the conception of the project, a systems approach to construction and skilled finish carpentry at the end.

With a new home, you get today's technology to make that new home comfortable and energy-efficient, from radiant floor heat to structural insulated panels (SIPs). And if you're seeking that "old house" exterior look as many of today's clients do, you get that as well.

"There's a tremendous appeal in older homes," says company

founder Andy Leach. "People love the look and character of older homes. But they want energy efficiencies, too. And people are looking for floor plans that are better designed for the uses of space we need today. So that's what we give them."

Recently repatriated after more than a decade in the building trade around Boston, Leach has put his wide range of construction experience to good use in his native Champlain Valley. Among other projects, Leach and his two brothers recently completed his "new/old" home, in a wooded development in Jericho, near the Richmond border.

The front of the Leach home features stained cedar shakes on the upper level and natural clapboards on the lower. The porch includes fir railings custom milled by Leach Construction and an "arch effect," which is continued through the home's exterior and interior. Peachtree windows and doors are from Milton Building Supply. Insulated concrete forms from S.T. Griswold & Co.



PHOTO BY JUDY LEACH



Like a traditional New England farmhouse, the home reveals an entirely different look as you proceed up the driveway. "There's a sense of discovery," says Andy Leach. "I like that." In his design, Leach also continued the "arch effect" over the home's entrance and over a recessed second-story porch, which is accessed from the master bedroom. The home was sited carefully within an archeological zone, which was mapped by Trudell Consulting Engineers and O'Brien Brothers Agency, Inc.

It not only serves as home to Andy, his wife and business partner, Judy, and their three young children, but also as a model of the "complete package" they offer, blending the older exterior look with a more open interior and energy efficiencies. On a recent tour of the property, Andy and his brother Todd explained.

"We incorporated many design elements to capture the look of an older home," says Todd. "The house is modeled after a classic New England farmhouse, which is typically a story-and-a-half. Rather than having two full stories, the second floor is actually 'in' the roof. The roof has a steeper pitch and wide overhangs. The heavy trim with crown molding, wide cornerboards, two-over-two wood-clad windows, a variety of wood sidings, and a large, welcoming front porch, are all reminiscent of older construction."

The use of materials and patterns is important in defining the home's character, says Andy. "We have only about \$100 worth of copper on the entire house," he notes, "but put in the right places, it makes a great accent. Another design element we used consistently throughout the project is a curve found in the archway leading into the sunroom and continued in the doors and cabinetry, the fireplace, and the trim on the porches.

"Like an old farmhouse, the front of the house facing the road is not that big, but the structure extends back. You can't see the garage or any of the house's seven skylights from the road. You get a sense of discovery as you come up the driveway. It's hard to tell

exactly how old the house is when you first see it. I like that."

Back inside, Judy Leach notes the "older look" also manifests itself on the custom details of the interior, despite the open floor plan. "There isn't one square box type of room in the whole place. There are varying ceiling heights, and lots of nooks and alcoves to keep it interesting. The guys custom-milled the trim and newel posts instead of using off-the-shelf stock. Andy built the fireplace mantel using a 100-year-old fir beam that he had salvaged off another job. The quality and craftsmanship of their work is evident in the details throughout the project."

BUILDING "TIGHT"

Materials are chosen not only with respect to the character of each house, and the belief that each home should reflect the owner's tastes and lifestyle, but also with respect to energy efficiency. Leach Construction of Vermont uses a "systems approach" and innovative building technology to create the maximum energy efficiency possible within the framework of each house design and budget.

This approach toward their own home earned Leach Construction of Vermont a Gold Award for Energy Efficiency and a Silver Award for craftsmanship from the Northern Vermont Home Builders and Remodelers Association in their 2003 Better Homes Awards, along with a Five Star energy rating from Efficiency Vermont, represented by a plaque outside the front door.



The recessed porch leads into the home's master bedroom, which exemplifies the "story-and-a-half" concept, where second-story rooms are built "into" the roofline, resulting in ceilings that are angled and of varying heights. The hope chest was hand-built by Philip Vampatella, who also built other furniture throughout the house.

The kitchen centers on an island custom-made with curves and banding by Andy Leach. Also shown, Canadian red birch stock cabinetry, with custom trim by Leach, and Energy Star appliances and lighting.



In planning the home, Andy and Todd Leach had researched alternative technologies and were considering SIP construction versus conventional stick framing. They contacted Jeff Gephart, an Efficiency Vermont liaison to builders, who referred them to Al Rossetto, a former *B/A* Builder of the Month, who recently built a home with the highest energy rating ever recorded in Vermont.

"They took one look at Al's house," says Gephart, "and the rest is history."

The Leaches used several technologies and products to earn the Five Star rating:

- Insulated concrete forms (ICFs) for the foundation.
- Structural insulated panels (SIPs) for the walls.
- Expanding spray foam insulation in the ceilings and other areas.
- High efficiency, low-temperature radiant floor heating system.
- Energy recovery ventilator (ERV) to pro-

vide fresh air and heat recovery.

- Low-e argon windows and insulated fiberglass doors.
- Energy Star lights and appliances.

Says Andy, "When Judy and I moved back to Vermont and decided we wanted to build our own house, we thought, 'This is a perfect chance to evaluate a lot of systems and see how they would work.' Basically, we were able to experiment with our own house.

"Efficiency Vermont turned out to be a great resource for evaluating things like appliances, lighting, heating systems and spray foams. They put us in touch with local manufacturers and builders who are using these new materials and ideas.

"We found that a single high-efficiency hot water heater works fine to heat both potable water and the radiant floor heat in a combined system. If you can control the thermal insulation and the air infiltration, you can significantly downsize the heating system. You can also reduce the temperature of the radiant floor heat, so that it won't impact the hardwood flooring above it.

"The combination of using ICF foundations and SIP walls gives us twice the insulating values over most conventionally built homes. The ICFs form the concrete walls with insulation on both sides. For SIPs, we used the thickest panels available, six-and-a-half-inch urethane. The urethane has better insulating capabilities and a better fire rating than the EPS (expanded polystyrene). We use an expanding spray foam insulation to cover the ceilings and cantilevered areas to create a really tight building shell. With such a tight building, you also need an ERV to provide fresh air exchanges, and recapture the heat from this process.

This system of building achieves energy efficiency at a reasonable cost. Increased energy savings and a healthier, more comfortable living environment further enhance the value of these homes.

A FAMILY AFFAIR

With Leach Construction of Vermont's core team consisting of Andy and his broth-



Stepping into the living room, a Mendota gas-fired unit is surrounded by a cultured stone fireplace built by Andy Leach, topped by a mantel he milled from a 100-year-old fir beam salvaged from a previous jobsite. The Eldorado cultured stone was supplied by Cleary Stone Company.

ers Todd and Scott, and with Judy also handling numerous aspects of the operations, it is truly a family business. And the culmination of a lifelong ambition.

Judy recalls meeting Andy at UVM, where he was earning a degree in business and she in biology. "Even back then, from the first time I met him, he told me he'd always wanted to design and build houses. He's never deviated from that. His vision and talent is the driving force behind the company's success."

Shown is the open floor plan of the home's interior. The stairway includes cherry treads and cherry and birch newell posts, custom-built by Leach Construction. Faux painting in this photograph and throughout the house was done by Judy and Andy Leach with paint supplied by Vermont Paint Company.





Like a traditional Vermont farmhouse, the Leach home includes an inviting front porch, with built-in barrel vault ceiling, custom trim details and custom-milled fir handrails and posts, all by Leach Construction. The southern yellow pine beaded ceiling and mahogany decking are both from Milton Building Supply.

Andy and Judy relocated to Massachusetts, seeking better job prospects in the lean market of the late 1980s. Judy joined an environmental consulting firm and earned her master's degree in environmental science, experience which serves Leach Construction well as she takes the lead in much of the design and permitting involved in their projects.

In Massachusetts, Andy spent four years with a general contractor as a builder and business manager, followed by four years with a millwork company that specialized in historic restoration, acquiring fine woodworking skills that allow him to put those finishing touches on a Leach Construction home. Eventually, he started his own construction business in Massachusetts.

Todd also graduated from UVM with a degree in small business, which first took him to Colorado, where he worked in the hotel and tourism industry in Winter Park for six years. He came back to New England to join Andy in the business four-and-a-half years ago. Todd became an owner with Andy and Judy when the busi-

ness relocated to Jericho, only a few miles from the Leach family farmhouse in Westford, where the brothers' parents still live.

"I have always had the goal of owning and operating a small business," says Todd. "When I joined Leach Construction, Andy was doing everything from fieldwork to administration. Judy was keeping the books while juggling her own career and raising a family. I saw an opportunity to help develop the business and to alleviate some of the pressure from Andy and Judy. We divided the workload into three major categories: fieldwork, administration and business development. This approach allows each of us to utilize our natural talents."

Adds Andy, "Todd understands the big picture. He is able to identify and pursue business opportunities, take the lead in project estimating, and help run the projects and crew. He is involved in every aspect of the process, from the design right through the detail and finish work."

Scott Leach came on board to join his brothers two years ago, and has a degree from Champlain College. "Scott is consistent and thorough, and has the ideas and skills to continually improve the systems in the field," says Judy. "The entire team is committed to making sure that the family's reputation is upheld in all aspects of the business. Each person has a vested and integral role in making that happen."

ONE CLIENT'S EXPERIENCE

Tina Kalfus connected with Leach Construction via a mutual acquaintance and couldn't have been happier with the job they did remodeling and expanding the 1969 ranch home she'd grown up in.

"We wanted to update the kitchen and the bathroom and improve a mother-in-law apartment," says Kalfus, "and we wanted to make it more energy-efficient. Andy gave us lots of advice and we went with everything he suggested. We basically gutted the whole house and redid it.

"We wanted to add a shower to the master bath and he did that, very creatively, in a very small amount of space. It's amazing what he did with the entire house. We gave him a list of things we wanted, and he looked at the dimensions and made everything fit. The house feels so much more complete.

"We found that Andy and Todd were so receptive to what we wanted. They were very open and explained everything in such detail. They took the time to help me understand. Andy has a lot of expertise in finish work. All in all, the work was really good and we're very happy with it. We really feel we got our money's worth."

Whether it's a remodeling project, developing building lots, or designing and building custom homes, Leach Construction of Vermont seeks to deliver a complete package of quality craftsmanship, energy efficiency and enduring value in all their endeavors.

Congratulations to Leach Construction of Vermont on their selection as Builder of the Month. You may reach them at 30 Bradley Bow Rd., Jericho, 05465. Or by calling (802) 434-5578, or visit their Web site at www.leachconstructionvt.com. ■