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# custom **wow**

**A MADE-TO-ORDER HOUSE IN VERMONT DELIVERS ON ENERGY EFFICIENCY, FUNCTIONALITY, AND CLEAN, CONTEMPORARY DESIGN**





THE FRONT PORCH is a defining design element on Colleen and Rich Tremblay's Shelburne, Vermont, house (LEFT). The rusted steel panels and Douglas fir, which wraps the ceiling and built-in bench (ABOVE), create a welcoming glow that contrasts with the gray tones of the cement-board siding and standing-seam metal roof. "The asymmetrical design is intended to draw visitors in from the street," says architect Christian Brown, "almost like an open hand."





## “After looking at 50 houses,

we were ready to give up,” says Colleen Tremblay of her hunt for a home that was contemporary, open, highly energy efficient, and just the right size for her, her husband, Rich Tremblay, and their young son, Tegan. “We couldn’t find anything Modern that wasn’t enormous. What were we going to do with 5,000 square feet?”

It was 2011, and the Tremblays had moved from San Francisco to Burlington, Vermont, to be closer to family. But as discouragement began to creep in, they visited the home of architect Christian Brown, a house just outside Burlington in Jericho, Vermont, that he had designed and was now offering for sale. Though the location wasn’t quite right for them, the building’s Modern design and smaller scale offered everything they wanted. Within five months, they had hired Brown, collaborated on the initial plans, and broken ground on a 2-acre lot in nearby Shelburne, Vermont. The foundation was poured in February 2012 and they moved into their new 2,700-square-foot house the following November.

Brown and his partner, Lauren Davis, whose firm, Brown + Davis Design, is in Jericho, worked closely with Efficiency Vermont, a nonprofit statewide initiative that provides free technical assistance, incentives, and other support to help homes and businesses reduce energy costs. Together, they selected components for the building’s shell that would yield maximum thermal performance and make the house as tight as possible. The exterior walls, for example, are made of custom-manufactured structural insulated panels that have sheathing wrapped around 8½ inches of solid foam faced in durable, low-maintenance cement board, with small sections of clapboard for design accents.

The house was carefully sited on the southwest-facing lot to take advantage of solar exposure and the mountain views. On three sides — those that face the road and neighboring properties — there are few windows, which enhances both energy efficiency and the sense of privacy. But the fourth side, which faces southwest, is filled with large windows designed to provide passive solar gain and a striking, wide-angle panorama of the Vermont landscape. “I wanted the ‘wow’ factor,” says Colleen. She got it.

Brown’s floor plan has living spaces on the main level and bedrooms on the walkout ground level. The front door of the house opens to a small foyer with a coat closet and half bath; the foyer leads directly to the two-story-tall living, dining, and kitchen area, where radiant heat warms the polished concrete floor and ductwork and structural steel beams are left exposed.



**AN ISLAND SEPARATES** the kitchen from the living/dining area (FACING PAGE). It and the other under-counter custom-made zebrawood cabinets provide ample storage. The staircase leads to a small home office/TV room. At the end of the kitchen work space (LEFT BOTTOM), a pocket door leads to the pantry, while the door to the right opens to the mudroom. A view to the front foyer (LEFT ABOVE) demonstrates how the industrial I-beams and perforated stainless steel give graphic definition to the interior.





### DESIGN DECISION *Everything in its place*

The open kitchen is a central design element — and daily gathering space — in Colleen and Rich Tremblay's contemporary Vermont home. She's an avid cook who is highly organized and likes to keep things tidy. As in the rest of the house, the focus here is on clean lines and functionality.

"I think we worked harder on the kitchen than on any other area," she says with a laugh. "I didn't want any wall cabinets, so Christian [Brown] spent days designing the storage spaces under the counters. Everything is tucked away and in the right place."

To illustrate the point, she opens a narrow cabinet directly under the deep kitchen sink. This holds her cutting boards, close at hand for chopping food and near the garbage disposal, where she can discard the scraps. The Blanco faucet is a flexible hose that detaches from a horizontal arm that rotates 360 degrees; she can swing the arm over the counter, for example, to fill a heavy pot with water.

The kitchen cabinets were custom-made of striped zebrawood by

Mark Simon of Williston, Vermont. The countertops are made of Vermont marble, and the major appliances are from Thermador.

A nearby wall holds a built-in stainless steel refrigerator, flanked by a nearly invisible cupboard that stores dishes, glasses, pots, and pans. A pocket door leads to a pantry, designed by Vermont Custom Closets of Williston, with cubbies and racks for everything from cereal and spices to wine and seltzer water.

"My goal for the pantry was to come home from Costco and have a specific spot for everything I had bought," she says. "And I wanted to be able to see it all, not have it hidden." Another door leads from the kitchen to the mudroom, which has a built-in bench, storage cubbies, and a laundry chute for muddy clothes. Just off the kitchen is a screened porch with steps to the backyard and outdoor grill.

"My mom is a phenomenal cook, so I've learned a lot from her about what works, and why," says Colleen. "And this kitchen works very well. It's all about creative solutions."





“The central space is quite dramatic, which Colleen wanted,” says Brown. “But it lives well, because each area is carefully scaled. You don’t feel like you’re floating around in an airport hangar.”

“We didn’t want space that we weren’t going to use,” adds Colleen. “So we sized things accordingly and paid

**A MIX OF large pendant-style lights hangs close overhead in the living room, giving the space a more intimate feel. The southwest-facing windows provide a distant view of the Adirondack Mountains, plenty of natural light, and passive solar heat. The wood-burning stove and the warm palette of the furnishings bring an old-fashioned coziness to the contemporary setting.**

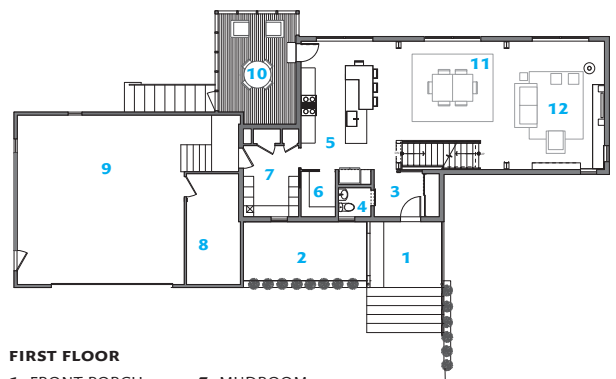
attention to economy of scale. Everything is designed to be functional.”

The Tremblays also placed a high priority on lighting. (“I don’t like poorly lit spaces,” says Colleen. “I want to feel like I’m on the surface of the sun.”) They chose suspended lighting for the kitchen and living spaces, a mix of pendant and track lights that hang close overhead for a more intimate feel. A massive ceiling fan, sold by the aptly named Big Ass Fans of Kentucky, hangs over the dining table. The furniture is mostly contemporary, punctuated by warm rugs and family antiques. On the walls is an eclectic mix of art ranging from carved masks to abstract and





**THE FRONT FACADE (ABOVE),** which faces the street, has few windows, lending the house a sense of privacy. The rear elevation (BELOW), however, takes full advantage of its southwestern exposure and mountain views with two rows of glazing on the upper level and casement windows on the lower, bedroom level.



#### FIRST FLOOR

- |               |                   |
|---------------|-------------------|
| 1 FRONT PORCH | 7 MUDROOM         |
| 2 ROCK GARDEN | 8 STORAGE         |
| 3 ENTRY       | 9 GARAGE          |
| 4 POWDER ROOM | 10 SCREENED PORCH |
| 5 KITCHEN     | 11 DINING ROOM    |
| 6 PANTRY      | 12 LIVING ROOM    |

#### BUILDER

**Leach Construction of Vermont**

realistic paintings to a wood etching by Colleen's mother.

A staircase lined with perforated stainless steel leads to a small loft that doubles as a television room and home office for both Colleen, a financial adviser, and Rich, a physical therapist. The ground level houses the master suite, a guest room, a bedroom for Tegan, now 4, and a full bathroom.

"I moved a lot as a kid; we lived in many different homes," says Colleen. "So by the time we arrived in Vermont, we knew what we wanted. We love to entertain and to spend time together as a family, so we didn't want any walls to separate us on the main floor. Meanwhile, the downstairs

bedrooms feel cozy, almost like a den. There's not one aspect of this house that I would do differently."

Others agree. In addition to receiving Efficiency Vermont's highest 5-Star Plus rating, the house won a People's Choice award and the Energy Star Energy Efficiency Award from the Home Builders and Remodelers Association of Northern Vermont and was recently given a Citation Award from the Vermont chapter of the American Institute of Architects.

"This house is clean and simple," says Colleen. "It has integrity. It celebrates what it is." 🏠

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