

THE MAGAZINE OF SPLENDID HOMES AND GARDENS • SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2012

# DESIGN

new england

RENOVATION  
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# Home Again

An of-the-moment addition to architect Sam Van Dam's 1850 farmhouse has him taking a nostalgic walk back to the Vermont of his boyhood

WRITTEN AND PRODUCED BY DANIELLE OSSHER  
PHOTOGRAPHED BY ROB KAROSIS



SAM VAN DAM'S home office (LEFT) is a haven of inspiration, fueled by the setting outside. The substantial sliding glass doors let in light and invite impromptu interludes in the garden, where the architect can recharge while checking on his vegetables. The picturesque exterior of the 1850 Gothic farmhouse (ABOVE) charms with its steeply pitched gables and old-fashioned front porch, complete with rocking chairs.





THE LIBRARY, ADDED to the original house in the 1880s, is now a pass-through from old to new. The two-over-two-style windows look like those typical of the era, but are new casement windows that mimic the design. At the end of the hall off the library (FACING PAGE) is the master suite. The narrow stairway leads up past Jane Van Dam's office (AT THE LANDING) and then to the loft.





## The quiet simplicity of Vermont's rural landscape

has always inspired Sam Van Dam. As a boy, he spent summers in the Green Mountains, where he loved to draw the picturesque scenes around him. Today, as an accomplished architect, he spends hours drafting plans in his home office, the same country view visible through 10-foot sliding glass doors.

"It's a place for me to work, to design, which is removed from the hubbub of my office," says Van Dam, whose firm, Van Dam Architecture and Design, is based in Portland, Maine. "I'm able to get away from the telephone and look at the mountains. When you can sit and see for a distance, it has a very calming effect and allows you to think. I do much better work when I'm in this kind of environment."

The small, historic town of Thetford, Vermont, has long been a destination for Van Dam, his wife, Jane, and their three now-grown children, who used the family's 1850 Gothic farmhouse for summer getaways. Then, in 2008, after completing





A WATERCOLOR OF a Maine landscape, one of many works Van Dam has painted over the years, hangs above the soaking tub in the master bath (ABOVE). In the master bedroom (FACING PAGE), more mock two-over-two windows swing open to views and breezes. A mechanism in the ceiling holds a single large mesh screen that pulls down to keep insects out. The kitchen (LEFT) is part of the original 1880s addition.





minor renovations on the house, which is postcard pretty with its covered front porch, steep dormers, and brick chimneys, Van Dam began crafting it into a forever home for himself and Jane as work started on an 1,800-square-foot addition.

“What we were looking for was a very energy-efficient house that we could retire in, where we could also have our family stay in a way that gave them plenty of room and have guests come,” says Van Dam. “It’s set up to work like two houses in one.”

The original house, with formal living and dining rooms at street level and three bedrooms upstairs, is now a hub for guests and entertaining. A small 1880s addition off the back where the kitchen opens into the library was extended with a barn-inspired wing that sits where an actual barn (moved down the hill and converted to a neighboring residence years ago) once stood. This new space is the couple’s own and includes a second-floor master suite and Van Dam’s airy, spacious ground-level home office.

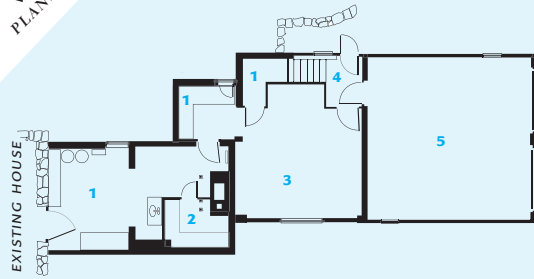
“It’s one of those sites that organizes itself, as many in New England do,” says Van Dam, who designed the 24-by-42-foot addition to work in conjunction with the 1880s architecture. It has

the “height and the hayloft” of a barn (his office boasts 11-foot-high ceilings) and takes full advantage of passive solar gain. But the narrow rectangular shape had Van Dam opt for a staircase that is just 20 inches wide, akin to those he had seen in his travels to the Netherlands. “I’m a Dutchman from way back,” he says, “so I spent a lot of time in Amsterdam. You see these stairs in the narrow row houses, and those stuck in my head as a way to solve a problem.”

For the addition, Van Dam mimicked the original 1880s two-over-two double-hung windows but had them made as casement windows that swing open. Their size and proportion vary, however, depending on use — a typical barn trait. “From the main roadway, it simply looks like a barn was added. Even though it’s a considerable size, we really wanted it to not be concealed,” says Van Dam.

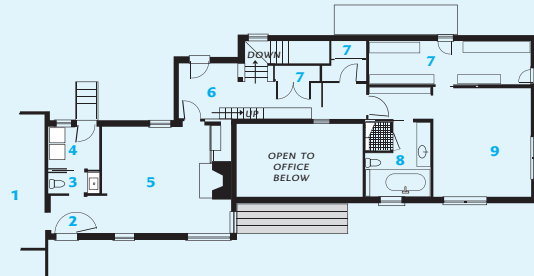
Away from the street, the south side of the addition has three solar panels that provide 80 percent of the home’s hot water. Six rain barrels, which hold 250 gallons each, collect water for the 9-by-18-foot vegetable garden.





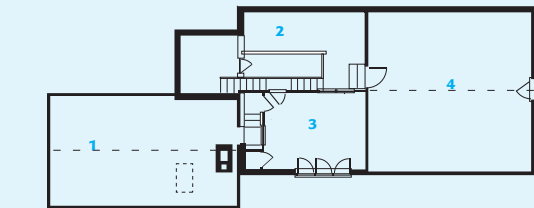
#### GROUND LEVEL

- 1 STORAGE
- 2 SAUNA
- 3 SAM VAN DAM'S OFFICE
- 4 ENTRY
- 5 GARAGE



#### MIDDLE LEVEL

- 1 EXISTING KITCHEN
- 2 SOUTH ENTRY
- 3 HALF BATH
- 4 LAUNDRY
- 5 EXISTING LIBRARY
- 6 LOWER BACK HALL
- 7 CLOSET
- 8 MASTER BATH
- 9 MASTER BEDROOM



#### TOP LEVEL

- 1 UNFINISHED
- 2 LOFT
- 3 JANE VAN DAM'S OFFICE
- 4 STORAGE

FLOORPLANS BY ERICK INGRAHAM



THE ADDITION WAS DESIGNED WITH THE CLASSIC NEW ENGLAND BARN IN MIND.

On the lower level, architect Sam Van Dam converted the existing garage into storage space, but took one corner of the footprint for the addition of a sauna easily accessible from his home office. On the middle level, the existing library remained intact, and the new barn-like structure affords a private master suite. The top level gives Jane Van Dam space for her own home office and provides more storage under the eaves.

**Architect**  
VAN DAM ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN

**Builder**  
CLYDE COOK







**VAN DAM DESIGNED** and installed the red cedar and steel arbor, which supports old grape vines, a year after the addition (FACING PAGE) was complete. Just outside the office, a 9-by-18-foot vegetable garden is sustained by six 250-gallon rain barrels.



**SAM AND JANE VAN DAM** relax in classic Adirondack chairs on the stone patio tucked into the nook of the L-shaped house where new construction meets old.

“The vegetable garden is really just a place to go — another something to work on in my daily routine,” says Van Dam, who deliberately placed it mere steps from his office. “I can wander outside and see how things are doing. It’s very refreshing to do that while working on a project.”

At the core of the barn addition is Van Dam’s “ideal” office — a place to fuel inspiration. Two workstations, a shop to build models, and the room to spread out and view various projects, are both contained in a space awash with natural light. On the other side of the sliding doors, grapes grow on old vines on the red cedar and steel arbor Van Dam designed, vegetables thrive in the garden, and the mountains beyond the backyard entice.

“Someone once told me that if you can find work that is the way you used to play, that you’re really a lucky person — and as a child my playing was all drawing,” says Van Dam, who still paints watercolors, several of which are hung throughout the house. “I’m here doing the same things I did when I was a boy, in a sense, and that’s basically the bottom line for why this is such a pleasure.” ■

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