



Craftsman Style With a New England Flair

A tight building budget forces an architect to think hard about his family's lifestyle as he designs their home

BY ERIC LEWTAS

My wife, Winnie, and I had always wanted to build our own home. We realized in 1996 that if we were careful with money, we could afford to begin looking for land.

After much fruitless searching, a friend's mother-in-law told us about a lot on her dead-end road that had been on and off the market for some time. Winnie and I walked up the then-closed part of the road to see the lot and found it to be the top of an old meadow. We both saw that it was perfect.

Winnie called the owner that week. He thought it was funny that we should call just then because he and his wife were wondering whether to list the lot with a real-estate agent again. They were considering building a retirement house there or, alternatively, selling the lot to a young family like ours.



At the end of an old meadow, trees shelter the house. The leaves protect from summer overheating, yet the trees let in winter sun. A separate garage doesn't dominate the small house. Photo taken at A on floor plan.

None of us had any real idea what the land was worth, so we split the cost of an appraisal. Winnie and I were disappointed when the appraisal showed the value to be significantly more than we could afford. Nonetheless, the owners suggested that we talk over lunch at their house. It turned out that the minimum that the sellers wanted from the sale was close to the maximum that Winnie and I could pay. We worked out a price and shook on it, feeling fortunate indeed.

A tight budget forces a thoughtful design

Our construction budget allowed a house of moderate cost and size—not the cheapest house, but not luxurious by any means. There was no money for features that we

didn't use, such as a formal dining room or a two-story foyer. Given this constraint, Winnie and I looked hard at how we really lived, and at what worked and didn't work in our old house.

We assumed that at least one of us would work at home in the future, so we needed an office. A two-car garage with space for storing yard equipment was a necessity, and I ended up squeezing a workshop into the basement. We used the porch of our old house as the living room during the summer, so I designed this house with a room-size screened porch.

Our final program was fairly simple: a kitchen; a combined family room and dining room, which we call the day room; a living room; an office; and three bedrooms (photo above; floor plans, p. 95).

Forms and elements from a number of sources that we like comprise the design. The living-room bay window, for example, is a Craftsman detail (photo top left, p. 94). This bay's exposed rafters are a detail common with bungalow porches and bays. Visible from inside the house only when you're sitting on the window seat, the exposed rafter tails are a rich surprise unique to that spot. The 6-over-1 windows and some woodwork details also reflect Craftsman bungalows.

Porch roof shelters the front door and anchors a change in the siding

The clapboard siding changes to shakes at the second-floor level, and small square windows tuck under the eaves. These details are common to shingle-style houses that were built in New England around the turn



North-facing window seat gets even natural light for reading. Exposed rafter tails are a detail borrowed from older bungalow-style homes. Photo taken at B on floor plan.

of the last century. I departed from the shake-over-clapboard theme at the front corner of the house. Here, the front wall steps out 5 ft. beyond the main body of the house, adding space for the mudroom and the day room (floor plans, facing page). I pondered the roofline and siding here for a while before deciding what to do.

I could have used a gable perpendicular to the main roof, but that looked too massive. I liked the look of continuing the roofline down to the front wall. However, this plan decreased the wall height, leaving a thin band of shakes across the front of the house that would be compositionally weak. I also could have extended the front wall farther outward, but that confused the massing of the house rather than reinforced it. Besides, our budget couldn't afford the additional square footage.

The front porch allowed the roofline to continue down and the shakes to end gracefully within the porch gable. To the right of the porch, clapboards continue to the eaves. The second-floor shakes begin again around the corner, 5 ft. in, emphasizing the addition of the mudroom and day room to the main body of the house. This solution was bold but worked the best.

Our garage is away from the house. Because of the house's relatively small size (2,135 sq. ft.), an attached garage would have been dominating. Besides, we didn't want the most frequently used entrance to

the house to be from the garage. I opened the main entrance into the mudroom, a necessary space in rural New England, where we call the limbo between winter and spring "mud season."

You don't need central air in New Hampshire

A Buderus (800-283-3787; www.buderus.net) propane-fired boiler heats the house by way of wall-mounted Buderus radiators, with radiant-heat floors in the tiled kitchen and mudroom. The tile lends itself well to radiant-floor heat, and because of limited wall space, fitting a radiator in the kitchen or mudroom would have been tough. We stopped the radiant-floor heating with those two rooms, however, because it doesn't work as well with wood floors, which we have elsewhere in the house.

We couldn't justify the cost of central air conditioning in New Hampshire, where it would be useful for only a couple of weeks during most summers. Instead, an attic fan (W. W. Grainger; 800-323-0620; www.grainger.com) cools the house as soon as the outdoor temperature is lower than the temperature inside. Based on the manufacturer's specs, I sized the gable louvers to exhaust the fan's maximum output.

The second floor's exterior walls extend only 5 ft. above the floor, lowering the roofline and improving the exterior proportions of the house. The resulting sloped ceil-



Details that ease New England winters. The main entry to the house faces south, so ice and snow melt off on sunny days. The floor grate allows snow stomped from boots to fall to the ground below. Photo taken at C on floor plan.



Porch does more than protect the entry. It also blends in the main roof as it extends over the bumped-out section of the first floor to the right of the front door. Photo taken at D on floor plan.

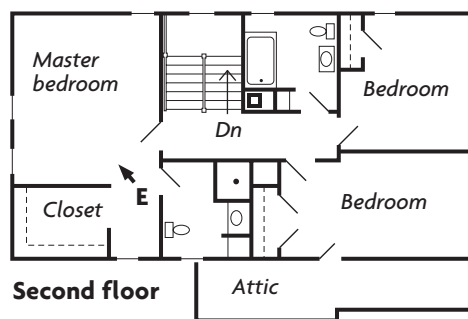


Designed for New Hampshire's snowy, cold climate, the house is organized around the sun's path

An open floor plan downstairs shares daylight between rooms and creates long interior views that make the house feel larger. The upstairs is more traditional, with lower, cozy ceilings.

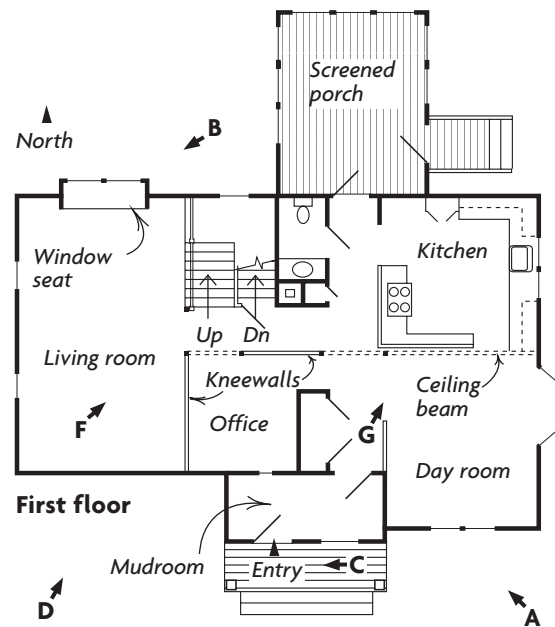
SPECS

Bedrooms: 3
Bathrooms: 2½
Size: 2,135 sq. ft.
Cost: \$91 per sq. ft., excluding land, site work and garage
Completed: 1998
Location: Hancock, New Hampshire
Architect: Eric Lewtas
Builder: Eric Lewtas



0 2 4 8 ft.

Photos taken at lettered positions.





Sloping ceilings add a cozy feel to second-floor rooms. Small awning windows on the sidewalls can be left open even during summer rains, while windows sized to meet bedroom egress codes are placed on gable ends. Photo taken at E on floor plan.



Most trim in the house is 4/4 pine. Where the edges of the boards show, heavier, more expensive 5/4 stock was used. Photo taken at F on floor plan.

ings give the bedrooms a cozier feel, while the 9-in-12 pitch of the roof rises quickly enough so that it doesn't limit the furnishing of the rooms (photo top left). As an added benefit, this ceiling and wall configuration reduces the heat-shedding exterior surface area of the house, a worthwhile consideration in a climate that occasionally reaches -30°F temperatures.

Small awning windows under the eaves light and ventilate all the second-floor rooms. The eaves protect the windows from the weather, and we leave them open even in the rain.

Spending the real-estate agent's commission on trim

Although lavish finish work wasn't in our budget, Winnie and I did want a high level of quality. One way that we achieved this quality was by saving money in other ways and spending the savings on finish work. First, we minimized our real-estate costs by selling our old house and buying the land for this house without involving a real-estate agent. This took some luck and a lot of work, but it freed thousands of dollars that would have gone to brokers' commissions. I drew the house plans, so the only design costs were for the septic system and for a review of the house plans by a structural engineer.

I considered what work I could do myself and realized early on that it made no sense for me to be pounding nails. Tradesmen

could do the hands-on building more efficiently and better than I ever could. Acting as the general contractor was the most efficient and cost-effective use of my time and existing skills. I had each tradesman include materials in his bid, reasoning that they knew their material needs better than I did.

I did chores that weren't overly critical to the sequence of the job and that were within my skills, such as wiring telephone and cable lines, insulating pipes and installing bathroom accessories. Winnie and I painted the house, which, while labor-intensive, didn't require a large tool investment. Much of the value in these tasks was that they kept me on site, in close touch with the contractors and available to answer questions.

Perhaps the greatest aggravation came in dealing with the construction loan. The bank's rules and schedules for loan approval and contractor payouts turned out to be moving targets. Still, I was able to ratchet the loan in our favor on one occasion when a close reading of the bank's rules revealed that "primed is painted." Because of this good luck, we only primed the exterior and applied the finish paint the next summer. This loophole freed money and time at a moment when they were much needed.

Details planned for simple execution cost little and add much

To achieve a rich finish on a budget, I kept the details straightforward and designed

them to be built using simple woodworking techniques and readily available materials. There are no complex details such as curved walls, cathedral ceilings, long spans or arched dormers.

One detail that I was able to add to the house was to step down the living-room floor by 7 in. Because the floor joists parallel the step, I could easily improve the room's proportions and set the room off from the rest of the house.

I limited the curves to the rake boards and the rafter extensions, which are easily cut



Kneewalls define the edges of the kitchen and day room. Windows on the east and south light these rooms, while cabinets line the windowless north wall. Photo taken at G on floor plan.

with a jigsaw. The site-built front-porch columns taper, but only in one axis to simplify their construction. When they are viewed head on, the columns' taper is evident, but from the sides, where they are rarely seen, the columns are straight. I used more robust 5/4 stock for some of the trim with exposed edges, such as the column and beam cladding. This material is more expensive but uses no more labor, so the additional cost is minimal.

Another simply executed detail is the siding change from clapboards to shakes at the

line of the second floor. Here, the second-floor shakes flare out over the first-floor clapboards. This flare breaks up the differing materials and adds a nice shape to the siding. A 2x4 cleat nailed over the sheathing kicks out the flare. Plywood nailed both to the wall sheathing and to the cleat provides nailing for the shakes.

We spent money to emphasize details that are visible and important to the design. The custom-made front door is the door that we almost always use, while all the other doors are production items. The kitchen-cabinet

facades are maple, but the interiors are basic white melamine.

After living in the house for a year, I haven't found anything significant that I would have done differently. We didn't get everything we wanted, such as a fieldstone fireplace in the living room, but we did get much of it. And most important, we have a house with real meaning, one that works well for the way we live. □

Eric Lewtas is an architect in Hancock, New Hampshire. Photos by Andy Engel.