

HOME & GARDEN

A special publication of the Addison Independent, October 5, 2023

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Denus pass the Countryside torch

Customers came first at this business success

By JOHN FLOWERS

MIDDLEBURY — Eric Denu, known to many as the owner and manager of Countryside Carpet & Paint in Middlebury, has spent 35 years helping Addison County residents fortify and beautify their homes and businesses.

Now Eric and his spouse Janice — who became a key player in Countryside around two decades ago — have sold the business, thereby freeing up more time for them to work on their own home, as well as travel, hike and garden.

“We thought it was time,” Eric said during a recent interview. “When you own your own business, it’s with you all the time. We put in some long days, a lot of hours, six

days a week. I don’t regret any of it, I’m just saying it was time to go out and smell the flowers, enjoy the fruit of our labors.”

The Denus recently sold the business to the trio of Brian Stark, Dan Angelini and Jacob Kent.

“We wish them the best,” Eric said. “We’re very comfortable with who we sold the business to and believe they will continue our legacy.”

It’s a legacy that began to take shape in 1988, when Eric launched Countryside Carpet & Paint in Middlebury’s Marble Works shopping complex. He soon moved it to a spot on Route 7 South, adjacent to the A&W Restaurant. Countryside remained at that

location until July of 2007, when the Denus purchased Phinney’s Decorating Center from then-owner John Wehde.

“Acquiring Phinney’s made us stronger in the tile and decorating/window treatment department,” Eric said.

Prior to that, Countryside was primarily about carpet and paint.

It was at this point that Janice became heavily involved in the business as a design consultant. The couple combined the inventories of both Phinney’s and Countryside to create a full-service home-improvement hub. The list of offerings became extensive and got longer under the Denus’ ownership. The bread and butter has been a wide selection of paints and flooring, including hardwood, carpet, tile, vinyl, laminate and rugs.

Customers have come to know that when they walk through the Countryside doors, they’ll get more than a basic transaction. Countryside workers have — and will continue — to dispense expert advice on how to deploy the products they sell to maximize the aesthetic and utilitarian impacts for customers.

The Denus made sure to accommodate folks who were not interested in do-it-yourself-jobs; Countryside has long offered flooring installation and repairs and kitchen & bathroom remodeling, among other customer services.

Both Eric and Janice put in a lot of grunt work through the years, but they eventually settled on specialties. Janice’s was dining tile, related treatments and “pulling everybody’s projects together.” But she pitched in wherever needed, whether it be mixing paint or unloading/loading delivery trucks.

“We wore many hats,” she said with a smile.

Eric immersed himself in the floor covering division, growing the commercial side of that business.

Tile has been key in Countryside’s growth, according to Eric.

“Tile is a bit more upscale and permanent,” he said of its popularity. “Every tile job can be customized to (the customer’s) needs. The longevity is huge.”

Day after day, year after year, the Denus built a customer base with jobs small and large. One job might involve tiling a small residential bathroom. Another job that same week

might involve installing flooring in a local school or at Porter Hospital. (See Denu, Page 8D)

“We’d be in a home on Christmas Eve laying carpet because family’s coming and that’s the only time we had to do it. And as soon as we were done laying the carpet, they were putting up the Christmas tree.”

— Eric Denu



ERIC AND JANICE DENU have sold Countryside Carpet & Paint in Middlebury to a trio of new owners — Brian Stark, Dan Angelini and Jacob Kent — but the Denus maintain offices in the Court Street building.

Independent photo/John Flowers

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LOCAL BUILDERS FIRST deconstructed this old house on South Street in Middlebury this past summer before putting up a modern, energy-efficient structure. Taking apart a structure piece by piece can save structural elements for reuse in other building projects and preserves landfill space.

Photo by Michael D. Roy

Tear down? Deconstruct a house & save good stuff

By JOHN S. McCRIGHT

MIDDLEBURY — It happens all the time; someone buys a house, loves the location, isn't wild about the structure itself. The question becomes, do they remodel the building to fit their needs, or tear it down and start new?

And if the decision is to start new, how do you get rid of the existing structure?

Bristol architect Elizabeth Herrmann says that in many such situations where she gets involved, the homeowner who wants to rebuild chooses to deconstruct the house piece by piece rather than knocking it down. This way they can reuse everything from cabinets and fixtures to studs and beams.

"It is a slower process, but it tends to be worthwhile," said Herrmann, who operates Elizabeth Herrmann Architecture and Design. "We always suggest it."

This past summer, Smith & McClain builders of Bristol worked on deconstructing an old home in Middlebury. Oakley Smith, principal of Smith & McClain, said the folks who bought the old house considered renovating it but after considering the deferred maintenance that needed to be done, as well as the small rooms, low ceilings and energy inefficiency aspects of the place, starting with a new building made sense.

"We also felt that the home's historical significance in comparison to others in the neighborhood were lesser, making it a good candidate for redevelopment into a net zero all-electric home that will utilize zero emissions ground source energy to heat and cool the home for the generations to come," Smith said.

So Smith & McClain hired subcontractors for asbestos testing and remediation, and did the removal of oil tanks, disconnection of utilities in preparation for deconstruction and hiring the deconstruction contractor. Their crew even helped get rid of a lot of the stuff left in the house in conjunction with the deconstruction process.

Smith & McClain worked on this deconstruction project with Tom Shea at Deconstruction Works; a partnership that for many years has reduced the amount of materials that end up getting landfilled. Shea and his talented team are connected to a network of folks who buy and repurpose materials.

"People buy bags of old fiberglass insulation for camps or whatever," Smith said. "This project had a decent timber frame that I believe is being reconstructed into a barn in Bristol."

It definitely takes longer to pull a house apart rather than just knock it down. An average size house can take three weeks to a month to deconstruct, depending on the size and how it's built, Smith said.

This sort of "green deconstruction" is sort of a win-win-win for the property owner, other builders and the earth.

"Many of our customers prefer this approach vs. landfilling for environmental reasons but it also provides a market for less expensive building materials for local folks looking for materials at lower cost," Smith said. "The sale of materials helps offset the cost of labor to deconstruct. Knocking down houses with excavators, trucking the materials to the transfer station and paying the tipping fees is very expensive and carbon intensive."

Group lighting elements to make your home more cozy.

It's decorative gourd time!

By Andrea Knepper
UVM Extension Master Gardener

It's the time of year when strangely-shaped, multi-colored, warty gourds begin to appear in gardens, markets, CSA boxes and on front porches. If you planted any type of gourds in your garden this year, enjoy peeking under leaves now to see what variations have developed.

Decorative gourds belong to the cucurbit family and can be classified into two types. Miniature pumpkins, warty varieties, winged and others with soft shells belong to the genus *Cucurbita*.

Those with hard shells, such as bottle, birdhouse and Calabash gourds, are members of the genus *Lagenaria*. Both types are easy to grow at home and share some basic harvesting and curing strategies to extend their decorative life. *Lagenaria* gourds, however, require an additional step to fully utilize their unique characteristics.

Gourds can be harvested when the stem begins to turn brown. Clip the stem a few inches from the gourd. Gourds can be left on the vine to dry completely but should be harvested before a frost.

Fully ripe gourds will have a tough skin that cannot be pierced with your fingernail. Underripe gourds can still be used but will begin to rot sooner.

To extend the life of your mature gourds, they also need to be dried to prevent decay. Wash the surface of harvested gourds and dry thoroughly.

Place gourds somewhere out of direct sunlight to continue drying. They can be set on a screen to increase air circulation or hung with string tied around their stems. Be sure to check regularly for moisture and prevent mold growth if you are drying the gourds on a solid surface.

The skin of *Cucurbita* gourds will be dry and hard in a couple of weeks. Now that your gourd is dry, it will last on display throughout the season. Gourds can be polished with vegetable oil for an attractive shine.

You may also choose to wax, shellac or paint your gourd at this point. If you do, remember that some decorative treatments should not be composted.

Lagenaria gourds require additional drying time to dry out the interior flesh as well as the outer skin. This drying process can take several months.

These varieties will be ready to use for displays or crafts when you can hear the seeds rattle inside. Historically, fully dried gourds of this type have been used for art or as musical instruments, utensils and containers.

Compost your gourds when they begin to show signs of deterioration or when you are done with them. You may find a surprise in your compost pile next spring! Gourds love the warm, nutrient-rich environment of the compost.

Andrea Knepper is a UVM Extension Master Gardener from Bolton.



Gourds come in a variety of shapes, sizes and colors, making them an ideal choice for both autumnal displays and crafts.

Photo by Andrea Knepper



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Roadside attractions

Middlebury Garden Club names 2023 winners



Kandi Cook Heller of New Haven



Kandi Cook Heller of New Haven



Beth Hill and Charles King Jr. in Cornwall



Misty Knoll in New Haven



St. Stephen's Church



Sheldon Museum garden

Addison County

was awash in flowerful contrasts this year.

Every year the Middlebury Garden Club gives awards to public and private gardens in Addison County. To be considered, a garden must be able to be seen from the roadside and cannot belong to a current member of the club.

The club recently announced its awards for the summer of 2023.

After the railroad tunnel project was completed last year, Middlebury's downtown showed off rich and varied colors from the roundabout up to the Congregational Church of Middlebury and St. Stephen's Church, with the Sheldon Museum garden and multiple hanging baskets along Main Street.

Director of Public Works Operations Bill Kernan oversees and coordinates the town's efforts on the bridge and Koren Crane does the Main Street baskets, while Ben Anderson-Ray and the talented team at St. Stephen's, along with the "Garden Gang" at the Congregational Church, have created a lovely approach to town.

A special shout out to Kandi Cook Heller of New Haven for her lush and varied garden, featuring Sweet William, lilac, poppies and stones. Kandi moved the garden in 2000 from an apartment and planted every tree on the property except for the arbor vitae in front of the house. She has rocks outlining the gardens and rock sculptures. Some rocks she has collected for years, mostly heart-shaped and striped, placed throughout the gardens. There are cedar archways and paths throughout, a peace sign-shaped rock garden, and a lilac meadow in the back. She has around 40 peonies, many lilacs on the property, with flowering fruit trees, some planted when they were the size of a pencil that are now 40 feet tall. The original tulips and daffodils were replaced with peonies, foxgloves and anemones, and forget-me-nots in between.

In Cornwall, Beth Hill and Charles King, Jr. have a whimsical garden in addition to planted acreage, with a focus on plants that reflect the feeling of their mid-1800s farmhouse: a mix of perennials, annuals, fruits and vegetables with an eye towards feeding the pollinators, and small beds that entertain passersby. Their gardens have been in process for 10 years with something new

added each year. Special plants have come from other homes, but they have moved, divided and reorganized them to create their gardens.

Down the road from Beth and Charles is the immaculately tended garden of Donn Marcus, changing with the seasons.

Much of what we see in Donn's island bed was planted before he moved there 22 years ago, including daylilies, Solomon's seal, and phlox. The mass planting of Siberian iris shows in spring. In summer flowering bulbs throughout the southern half of the bed and both deciduous shrubs (nine bark, Russian olive, dogwood, bridal wreath spirea) and evergreen shrubs (juniper) frame the back of the bed providing heft and vertical height. Spring brings ephemeral time (when these irises appear), peony time (lupines as well), rose time, and lily time. Each year brings varied conditions and threats, and the irises benefit from being situated on a slight downward slope that carries water the Champlain Valley receives into a trench running parallel to South Bingham Street.

On Chipman Hill in Middlebury one finds a study in contrasts. Lindsay Hart has been building her garden since she moved into her home. Her driveway is bordered with smoke trees and daylilies, along with container plantings and a lovely sitting area at the top of the driveway.

Turning the corner up Springside, one finds a different take — formal landscaping at the corner home of Judy Albright and Dory Gorton.

In East Middlebury, Linda and Howard Kelton have created gardens with Howard designing them and the couple choosing plants and shrubs from nurseries along with donations from their mothers, including perennial geraniums, bleeding hearts, lilies and peonies. They both tend the gardens, Howard mulching and edging and Linda weeding. They started the gardens around 40 years ago, eventually encircling the house and adding a vegetable garden.

Commercial properties: Shiretown Market in downtown Middlebury has nice plantings.

Misty Knoll in New Haven, tended by landscaper Steve Santor, uses a more formal garden approach to attract customers.

Editor's note: This story was provided by Beth Karnes Keefe.

Photos by Elizabeth Karnes Keefe and Susan Woloohejian



Donn Marcus in Cornwall



Linda and Howard Kelton in East Middlebury



Shiretown Market in Middlebury



Lindsay Hart in Middlebury



Judy Albright and Dory Gorton in Middlebury

It's time for some *ecologically sensitive* fall garden maintenance

By Bonnie Kirn Donahue
Extension Master Gardener
University of Vermont

It's September, and to many gardeners, that means it's time for end-of-the-year garden maintenance. This includes cutting back plants, clearing out leaves and composting most of the vegetation that grew this season.

Before continuing the normal routine, it's a good time to step back and think about the bigger picture. A question to consider is why do we clear out our gardens before the winter? What's the purpose?

One of the reasons that we put our gardens to bed is that herbaceous plants (like annuals and many perennials) will not hold up through the winter. Foliage turns brown and crispy, and the moisture from snow breaks down leaf structure.

Perennials store energy in their underground root systems and regrow fresh vegetation in the spring. Annuals are just that, and need to be replanted in the spring. The foliage of both is often cut back before the next growing season.

Additionally, cutting back certain

foliage in the spring can be a wet, gooey mess, and it is often easier to cut back plants when the soil and plants are dry.

A final reason for cleaning up garden foliage is to eliminate those diseases and pests that may overwinter on the dead plants or in the soil. Since pests and diseases can build up if plants are grown in the same place every year, make notes or a map of where your crops were in the garden this year and rotate them to a new spot next growing season.

I suspect that another reason for fall garden maintenance is the desire to have a tidy-looking garden at the end of the season. This is an opportunity to look at the bigger picture, and change our thinking.

In this case, appearance and ecological function are at odds. Many beneficial insects and caterpillars overwinter as eggs, larvae or adults in leaf litter. Bees and other beneficial insects create homes in hollow plant stems until spring. Birds feast on seeds to survive the long winter.

Take a look at a natural area near

where you live, and think about how it changes through the seasons. Nature is not tidy or clean. It is beautifully messy, regenerative and evolving.

If we can adjust our expectations about what is beautiful, and follow the lead of nature, we can cultivate gardens that are both lovely and ecologically sensitive.

How can we do this?

Start by leaving the plants with seed heads up through the winter. See which plants withstand snow loads, and which plants birds visit. Use this to decide what to do next year.

In my garden, plants such as sunflowers (*Helianthus* spp.), purple coneflowers (*Echinacea purpurea*) and black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia* spp.) hold up to the snow.

Leave plants with pithy, hollow stems such as milkweed, asters, goldenrod, bee balm, raspberry, elderberry, rose, ornamental grasses and many wildflowers. These stems will provide beneficial insects, including butterflies and bees, with homes throughout the winter.

Don't remove all the leaf litter in your garden. This natural blanket not only provides food sources and a home for butterflies and moths during cold months, it also provides nutrients to the soil as it breaks down.

Ideally, a layer of leaf litter could be left in your garden forever. But if you need to remove it, wait until after the insects have had a chance to emerge and relocate in late spring.

While many of the traditional fall-maintenance practices are valid, they are not applicable in all cases. Essentially, garden maintenance should be performed on a plant-by-plant basis.

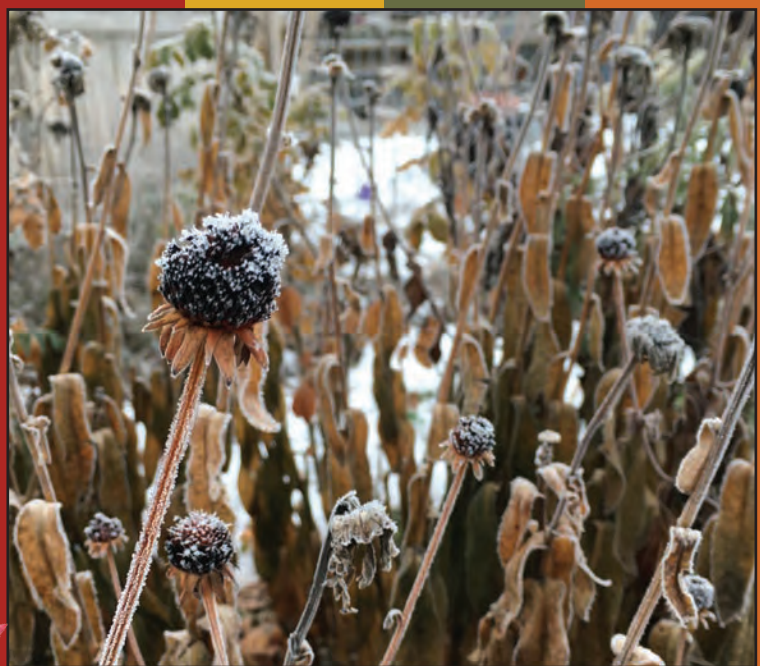
For information on adjusting your maintenance practices to create habitat in your garden, see *Nesting and Overwintering Habitat for Pollinators and Other Beneficial Insects* (go.uvm.edu/overwintering).

Bonnie Kirn Donahue is a UVM Extension Master Gardener and landscape designer from central Vermont.



ALTHOUGH PERENNIALS SUCH as black-eyed Susans could be cut back in the fall for a tidier-looking garden, they hold up to the snow so could provide visual interest and food for birds in winter.

Photo by Bonnie Kirn Donahue



LEAVING PLANTS WITH seed heads up through the winter is one way to provide a source of food for birds.

Photo by Bonnie Kirn Donahue

Line it up

WILDER YOST, LEFT, and Lukas Broughton frame up a wall for a house that their employer, Smith & McClain, is building on South Street in Middlebury. The owners of the property cleared away a dilapidated old house to make way for this totally modern structure.

Independent photo/Steve James

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Denu

(Continued from Page 3A)
The business earned a following, in part, by being flexible.

"There was big pressure around the holidays, getting floor covering done before Christmas," Eric recalled. "We'd be in a home on Christmas Eve laying carpet because family's coming and that's the only time we had to do it. And as soon as we were done laying

the carpet, they were putting up the Christmas tree."

While product names and industry trends changed, the Denu never changed their philosophy, according to Eric, a longtime member of the Rotary Club of Middlebury.

"We kept the same basic concept we started out with — providing great service, which we believe separates us from the box stores and other competition," he said. "That's helped us grow. The crux of our business has been the relationships we've built with homeowners and contractors — creating that trust."

Some of their customers have become personal friends.

"We're dealing with something very personal: Their home," Eric said. "I always, when we visited someone's home, was honored to have been asked to come into their home, whether it was measuring for carpet, wood flooring or whatever it might be. That always gave me a sense of pride."

Janice took pride in being able to "read" customers to get a sense of the home improvement projects they were looking for.

Her greatest joy as a design consultant: "When people came in and were so appreciative. They were overwhelmed at first, but you walked them through (their project) and helped them make decisions. And most of the (results) were beyond what they expected."

And most of the (results) were beyond what they expected."

Eric echoed that sentiment.

"Often, we don't get to see the final results, but when we do — and people want to show it off — that's very rewarding," he said.

While the Denu are no longer affiliated with Countryside, they'll continue to own the property, as well as the nearby 18 Creek Road building that houses Bradford

Kitchen & Bath, Salon Moxie and The Little Pressroom.

What will the Denu miss most?

They both cited their loyal customers, who they thanked for many years of patronage — a trend they believe will continue under the new ownership.

The store's new owners are joining the rest of the community in applauding the Denu as they move into retirement.

"They're fantastic, and really the reason we acquired the company," Kent said. "They've been here a long time, and have been very successful."

Kent said he and his colleagues don't anticipate major changes in Countryside's operations; they want to stick with what has been a winning formula.

"You add things here and there, but largely, we want to continue to have the relationships that exist," he said. "We have strong relationships with so many businesses in town, and the goal is to keep being what they need us to be."

As for the Denu, while they won't miss some of the long hours and six-day work weeks, they leave running Countryside with no regrets.

"It was something I always enjoyed doing," Eric said. "There was never a day when I didn't enjoy coming into work."

Reporter John Flowers is at johnf@addisonindependent.com.

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Furnish your home for comfort

The pandemic changed much about the way people live, including a propensity for spending more time at home. In 2020, people spent far less waking time, roughly an hour and a half less on average, with people outside of their own households.

Though restrictions that limited social interactions have long since been lifted, spending at home has remained popular. More than two-thirds of Americans are spending more time at home, according to the American Time Use Survey from the U.S. Department of Labor. Inflation and the looming threat of a possible recession are undoubtedly keeping more people at home. With all that extra time on their hands, respondents have been poring their energy into fixing up their homes. Lawns, kitchens and living rooms are popular spaces to renovate.

As people continue to fix up their homes, they may be interested in ways to make them more comfortable. Certain furnishings can ensure living spaces are comfortable places to pass the time.

- Ensure an abundance of light.

One stark overhead light will not create a cozy environment. Introduce groupings of illumination where you hope residents and guests will congregate to engage in conversation. Use different lighting sources, such as task lighting, table and floor lamps, recessed or ambient lighting, and even candles. Warm temperature light bulbs will add to that comfortable feeling.

- Coordinate designs for each season. Crisp cotton and breezy linens are great for the warm weather, but when the colder temperatures arrive, it's time to swap for flannel or jersey. Folded quilts or throws on the sofa also can be handy for chilly evenings. Make subtle changes to the home as the temperature changes to epitomize comfort in your spaces.
- Splurge on your sofa and bed. Much time will be spent lounging on the couch or sleeping in your bed. It's worthwhile to invest in pieces that are durable and, above all else, comfortable. While these items may be more expensive up front, the comfort they provide will be well worth it.
- Soften harsh lines. Tricks like

incorporating round area rugs or using oval or round pillows can break up the straight line of rooms and even modern furniture pieces. Opt for soft and inviting textiles as well. Textural elements, such as woven decor baskets, also can soften harsh lines.

- Introduce organic elements. Home entertaining expert Julie Blanner says plants, flowers, fruits and vegetables bring life to a space. Choose easy care plants if you do not have a green thumb, or swap out freshly cut blooms in vases as pops of color and fresh elements are needed.
- Use warm paint colors. Cool-toned paints can make a space seem colder and more utilitarian or clinical. When looking at swatches, select paints that have warm undertones. Eggshell and satin sheens will be more inviting and evoke a cozy feel more effectively than flat or matte finishes.

These are just a few ways to build a cozy and comfortable home. Working within these parameters, homeowners can customize their interior spaces to maximize comfort.

— Metro Creative

Outsmart winter with weatherization

VERMONT — Leaves are changing and temperatures are dropping. Winter is coming, and now is the time to think about how to save energy, money, and the planet during the heating season.

The annual Button Up Vermont campaign, supported by a partnership of energy services providers and clean energy champions, works each fall to raise awareness of the need to weatherize, and helps connect Vermonters with tools and resources to save.

Ways to save

There are several offers available to customers to help them outsmart winter and reduce their carbon footprint:

- Get \$100 back for completing three qualifying DIY weatherization projects (visit: tinyurl.com/DIYweatherizationRebate)
- Up to \$3,000 off comprehensive weatherization projects from Efficiency Vermont, and up to \$3,500 from VGS (visit: tinyurl.com/fkt77e42)
- Up to \$650 off ductless heat pumps (visit: tinyurl.com/HeatPumpRebate)
- Financing options starting at 0% interest (visit: tinyurl.com/HomeownerFinancing)

Local utilities also offer incentives that can help customers reduce the amount of fossil fuel they need to keep their homes warm. Contact your local utility

to find out how they can help you save.

Income-eligible families may also qualify for free whole-home weatherization service, through the state's Weatherization Assistance Program.

Ways to learn

In addition to tips and tools available at buttonupvermont.org, Vermonters can also participate in educational weatherization events online and in person:

Weatherization Wednesday is where you can get all the tips and energy expertise you need to weatherize your home. Each Wednesday in October, Button Up Vermont will host a live Q&A session on Facebook and Zoom.

Local in-person events in participating Button Up partner communities cover a range of topics, from heat pumps to whole home insulation. A full schedule of events is available online.

According to a report by Energy Action Network, thermal energy — energy used to heat buildings — accounts for more than one-third of Vermont's greenhouse gas emissions. Weatherization will play a key role in reducing overall greenhouse gas emissions from the thermal sector, combined with switching heating sources from fossil fuels to cleaner technologies like advanced wood heat and high efficiency cold climate heat pumps.

“We’re excited to spread the word

about weatherization, and work with local communities to help people take steps toward making their homes more affordable and comfortable, while helping reduce Vermont's greenhouse gas emissions,” said Becca White, Button Up Vermont coordinator for Efficiency Vermont. “Whether it’s making DIY improvements, signing up for a free energy savings kit, taking advantage of the many incentives offered for cold climate heat pumps, or participating in an event to learn more about weatherization, we urge Vermonters to take at least one step to save heat, save money, and reduce carbon emissions this fall.”

Button Up Vermont is a statewide effort to cut energy use and keep families warm and healthy. Partner organizations include utilities, regional planning commissions, nonprofits, and weatherization agencies. Visit buttonupvermont.org/partners for a complete list of partners and more information about the effort.

Button Up Vermont is sponsored by Efficiency Vermont. As the nation's first Energy Efficiency Utility, Efficiency Vermont has helped Vermont avoid over 12 million metric tons of greenhouse gas emissions and has received the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's ENERGY STAR Program for sustained excellence award for the last six consecutive years. Efficiency Vermont works with partners to help our state transition to a more affordable, low carbon energy future through education, incentives, and support for our clean energy workforce. For more information, contact Efficiency Vermont at (888) 921-5990 or visit www.efficiencyvermont.com.





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Improve the mood in your home with Houseplants

By DEBORAH J. BENOIT
UVM Extension Master Gardener

Plants may not be the first consideration in adding a personal touch to a room in your house, but they will add a touch of color and improve the mood of even the drabest space.

What makes a plant suitable for growing inside? Easy care and low maintenance top the list for many people, as well as slow growth or compact size for really low maintenance.

The snake plant (*Dracaena trifasciata*, formerly known as *Sansevieria trifasciata*), is sometimes called mother-in-law's tongue or Saint George's sword. Variegated, stiff, spear-shaped leaves grow straight up from a rosette-shaped base.

Don't worry if space is limited. This plant grows slowly. Snake plant will tolerate low light

conditions and irregular watering. It grows a bit faster with brighter light. Beware of watering too much or the roots will rot. Allow it to dry out between watering and water sparingly.

In contrast, the peace lily (*Spathiphyllum*) sports single white flowers (called spaths) above dark green foliage. It prefers moist, but not wet, soil. If you forget to water, this plant will remind you when its leaves droop.

Give it a good watering, being sure to empty any water accumulated in the saucer. Let the soil dry a bit between waterings. Peace lilies grow in medium to low light, such as a north-facing window. Avoid bright, direct sun.

Are you looking for a bit of visual fun?

Lucky bamboo (*Dracaena sanderiana*) can be found trained into spirals, even woven into decorative designs. Contrary to its common name, lucky bamboo isn't really bamboo. This easy-to-care-for plant prefers bright, indirect, filtered light. Avoid direct sunlight. It's often grown with no soil in a container of pebbles and water.

When watering, use tap water that has been sitting at room temperature for at least a day to allow chlorine to evaporate, or use bottled water. Change water periodically, and don't let the water level get below an inch. If grown in soil, be sure it's well drained, not soggy.

Pothos (*Epipremnum aureum*) and heartleaf philodendron (*Philodendron hederaceum*) are equally suitable for the desktop, trailing from the top of a bookcase or a hanging basket. These vining houseplants are easy to care for, requiring indirect light and watering about once a week. Allow soil to dry a bit between waterings.

Aloe vera (*Aloe barbadensis miller*) and other succulents are good alternatives for bright spaces. They prefer six hours of bright, indirect light a day.

Be sure the potting mix drains well, as excess water will result in rot. In general, water every few weeks. Aloe vera sports thick, fleshy leaves with serrated edges, but succulents come in many sizes and shapes.

If you already have a favorite plant that requires bright light but room conditions are medium to low light, single-plant grow lights are available.

If conditions are dry but your plant likes humidity, mist daily and place on a tray of pebbles filled with water. Be sure to keep any drainage hole in the pot above the water level.

What if there's absolutely no room for a plant?

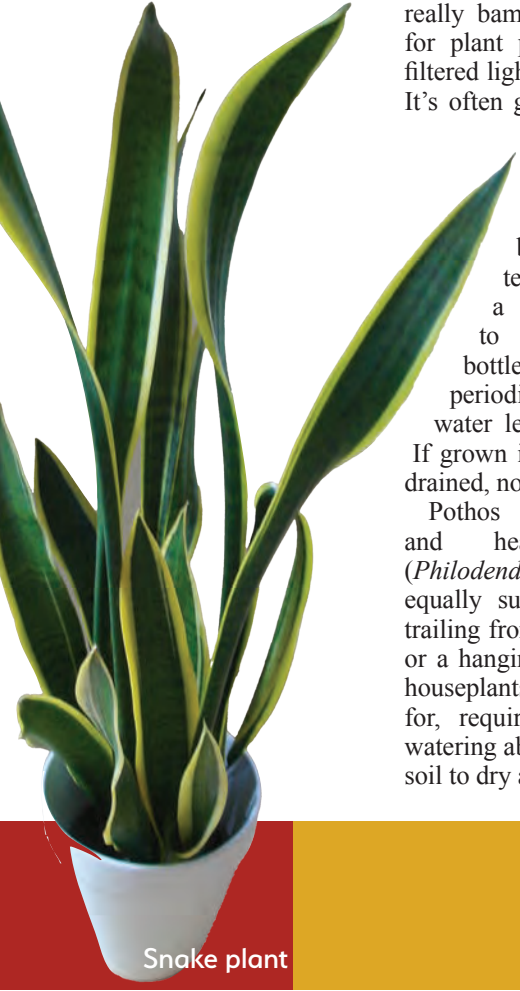
Consider an air plant (*Tillandsia*). In nature, air plants grow on other plants and have no need for soil. They require little care and can be placed anywhere there is bright, indirect light.

Water air plants by misting with a spritz of water a few times a week and periodically by submerging in water for 30 minutes. Let dry, then return to its usual location.

No matter what the conditions, there's always room for a bit of nature in almost any room in your house, and there's a plant that will grow there.

For more information and to view the Houseplant Hero video series, visit the University of Vermont Extension Master Gardener resources website at go.uvm.edu/gardenresources and click on the "Houseplants" tab.

Deborah J. Benoit is a UVM Extension Master Gardener from North Adams, Mass., who is part of the Bennington County Chapter.



Snake plant



GARLIC CAN BE planted into holes made in black plastic mulch, which suppresses weeds and helps warm soil in the spring, encouraging early top growth.

Photo by Vern Grubinger/UVM Extension

Start now to grow great garlic next summer

By VERN GRUBINGER
UVM Extension Vegetable and Berry Specialist

Garlic is an unusual crop. It's vegetatively propagated, planted in the fall and especially flavorful. It probably originated in central Asia, and then was brought to Europe, and by the early 1700s, to America.

There are two types of garlic. Hardneck garlic forms a false flower stalk in the spring called a scape. Its bulbs usually have five to seven large cloves.

Softneck garlic doesn't produce a scape. Its bulbs contain a dozen or so smaller cloves. Elephant garlic is not a garlic at all, but in the leek family. It produces large bulbs with three or four cloves.

Garlic grows well in many different soils and climates, but only varieties that are hardy and adapted to the Northeast will perform well here. These are best obtained from commercial garlic growers in your area or from seed companies that specialize in serving the Northeast. Once you find a variety that does well in your garden, you can save the largest and healthiest bulbs for re-planting to build your own seed stock.

Individual garlic cloves should be planted in late October, about a month before the ground freezes. This timing allows roots to establish, but shoots won't get up above ground level. Set cloves about four inches deep, eight inches apart.

Next spring, each clove will form a bulb with the same genetic makeup as the original clove. Garlic requires a cold treatment to induce bulbing, so garlic planted in the spring will only produce a small single bulb without cloves.

Garlic grows best with a soil pH of 6.2 to 7.0. Add lime, phosphorus and potassium as needed, based on soil test recommendations, and incorporate those thoroughly prior to planting.

A light addition of mature compost can benefit

garden soil that's low in organic matter. In spring, apply about 3 pounds of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet on top of the garlic planting when the shoots are about six inches high. That's equivalent to about 20 pounds of Chilean nitrate, 25 pounds of dried blood or 50 pounds of soybean meal. Scratch in lightly if possible.

Mulching garlic with a thick layer of clean straw after planting helps control weeds and retain soil moisture. In a wet spring, mulch can keep the soil from drying out and lead to soil-borne diseases, so pull it away from the garlic if the soil remains saturated due to frequent rain. Plastic mulch, with holes for each clove, is another option for weed control.

Good weed control is critical. If no mulch is used, shallow cultivation will be needed. A narrow collinear hoe works well in tightly spaced crops like garlic. Apply irrigation frequently during dry periods to ensure good growth.

Harvest garlic once the lower third of leaves begin yellowing, usually in late July. The ideal time is when bulbs attain maximum size but cloves have not started to separate inside the bulb. Dig up a few bulbs and cut them in half, perpendicular to the cloves, to see if they're ready.

After pulling the bulbs, gently wash them or rub off the soil later once the bulbs are dry. For good storage, thoroughly dry bulbs for several weeks. Hang them in bundles or spread out on a piece of wire fence in a well-ventilated shed or other structure protected from the elements.

Garlic should keep for several months in paper or plastic mesh bags in a cool, relatively dry, dark and well-ventilated area, such as some basements. Temperatures in the 50s and about 50% relative humidity are ideal.



AFTER PLANTING GARLIC can be mulched with six inches of clean straw to protect bulbs against freezing and thawing in the winter and to suppress weeds.

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Improve your composting skills with these free workshops

ADDISON COUNTY — Emily Johnston, the Public Outreach Coordinator for the Addison County Solid Waste Management District Board, invites homeowners and renters to come to a free workshop hosted by the ACSWMD this fall. Upcoming topics include Backyard Composting, Vermicomposting, and Plastic Recycling.

To attend, please fill out the sign-up form or call the District Transfer Station in Middlebury at 802-388-2333. Registering allows the district to bring enough supplies and alert attendees of any scheduling changes.

To see when the upcoming workshops are happening, head online to addisoncountyrecycles.org/food-scraps/composting/workshops#c1696. Here are some workshops that are already planned:

Backyard Composting — Learn what makes

a compost pile successful, the different types of compost, how to build a pile, and ways to troubleshoot common compost problems. Oct. 11, 12 noon — Location: Ilsley Public Library, 75 Main St., Middlebury.

Vermicomposting: Worms Ate My Food Scraps — Worms crawl through layers of bedding and food scraps, eating as they move, digesting the food waste into nutrient-rich castings. Come learn about vermicomposting systems. — Oct. 23, 5 p.m. — Location: Ilsley Public Library, 75 Main St., Middlebury and Oct. 24, 5:30 p.m. — Location: Bixby Memorial Free Library, 258 Main St, Vergennes.

Plastic Recycling: Demystified — Filmy, hard, stretchy, made to last, and made to break apart; plastic is versatile and tricky to recycle. Attend to learn the dos and don'ts of plastic recycling. — Nov. 14, 5:30 p.m. — Location: To Be Determined.



Make your home a sanctuary with these ideas

Homes are often characterized as sanctuaries for their residents. A calm place to come home to after a busy day at work or school is often just what people need to unwind.

Certain design components can help individuals turn their homes into relaxing respites from the daily grind. With that goal in mind, individuals can consider these ideas to create a peaceful feel inside their homes.

- **Paint with neutral colors.** Wall colors can define the mood in a given room, and neutral colors have long been linked to a calming effect. Subtle shades like beige, taupe and light gray are known to create a relaxed vibe in a room, so these colors can be a go-to choice. Some people consider neutral colors a tad boring, so individuals concerned by that impression can limit neutral colors to rooms designated as sanctuaries, like a reading room, a spa bathroom or a bedroom.

- **Employ natural light.** Natural light also can help to establish a serene setting at home. Large windows that let daylight in can improve anyone's mood. A 2022 study from researchers at the University of Chile in Santiago found that the more natural light that entered a home, the happier people said they felt. Study authors even noted that the largest uptick in well-being was found among participants who lived in homes in which windows covered at least 40 percent of the dwelling's wall space. Opening blinds or curtains and, if possible, installing larger windows in a home can help to establish the relaxing,

happy vibe individuals are aiming for.

- **Use plants to set a peaceful tone.** The United Kingdom-based Royal Horticultural Society notes that research has found that indoor plants can benefit psychological well-being. The RHS notes that improved mood and reduced stress levels are two benefits that indoor plants can provide. A good mood and less stress can help individuals establish the peaceful feel they're aiming for at home.

- **Keep devices out of bedrooms.** Watching television while lying in bed, scanning a smartphone before turning off a nightstand light and retiring for the night, or reading an e-reader instead of a print book at night can transform a bedroom from a serene setting into one that's overrun with stimuli. According to the Sleep Foundation, technology stimulates the mind, which can make it harder to fall asleep. In addition, blue light emitted by devices disrupts the natural production of melatonin, a hormone that makes it easier to fall asleep. That can negate any efforts individuals have undertaken to make their bedrooms as peaceful as possible. Designate bedrooms in the house as technology-free zones to ensure the peaceful vibe continues uninterrupted until everyone goes to bed.

A peaceful home makes for the perfect respite at the end of a busy day. Various design choices can help individuals establish a serene vibe throughout their homes.

— Metro Creative

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Businesses must pay for disposal and must call 388-2333 for an appointment.

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Acids	Driveway sealer	Mercury thermostats	Rechargeable batteries
Adhesives	Dry cleaning solvents	Mineral spirits	Roach traps/poison
Algaecides	Flea & tick killer	Mothballs	Rug/upholstery cleaner
Aerosols	Fluorescent bulbs*	Motor oil	Solvent-based Glues
Antifreeze	Fly killer	Mouse/rat poison	Stains
Ant killer	Formaldehyde	Nail polish	Stump remover
Ammonia	Fuel additives	Nail polish remover	Tars or resins
Auto body filler	Fungicides	Naphtha	Transmission fluid
Automotive fluids	Furniture polish	Oil-based paint	Tub & tile cleaner
Chlorine bleach	Gasoline	Oily waste	Varnish
Brake fluid	Hair dyes	Oven cleaner	Weed killer/fertilizer
Bug spray	Kerosene	Paint thinner/turpentine	Wood preservative
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Not accepted: laboratory chemicals, pharmaceuticals, fireworks, flares, explosives, smoke detectors, ammunition, and radioactive waste.



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Kitchen cabinets

Replace or reface?

The kitchen is a busy room in many homes. That popularity likely has something to do with why so many homeowners spend sizable sums renovating their kitchens. According to highlights from the 2022 U.S. Houzz Kitchen Trends Study, the median spend on major kitchen remodels grew by 14% from the previous year, and minor remodels increased by 25%. Spurred on by increased time spent at home during the pandemic, the main impetus for kitchen remodels according to the study was that homeowners wanted to make these improvements all along and finally had the time and means to do so.

There are many aspects of a kitchen that homeowners can change. Houzz found 94% of renovators either fully or partially replaced cabinets in their improvement plans. Cabinets are a major component of kitchen layouts. Cabinets help to establish

the aesthetic of a kitchen and serve a useful function, providing necessary storage space to ensure the room does not appear cluttered.

Homeowners have different options when it comes to cabinet renovations, and they may need to decide if they need to replace or reface their cabinets.

REPLACEMENT

Cabinet replacement involves removing all of the existing cabinets before new cabinets are leveled and installed. According to the home improvement resource The Spruce, homeowners can expect to pay between \$13,000 and \$30,000 for contractor-grade cabinets. Cabinet replacement is a good idea when homeowners want to add more cabinet space or create a new layout in the room.

REFACING

Cabinet refacing is less messy and less disruptive than replacement. All cabinets remain the same size

and in the same location. The cabinet boxes must be in good shape to facilitate a refacing. The process involves installation of new drawer fronts and cabinet doors, as well as veneering of the cabinet boxes. New hardware typically is installed as well. The insides of the cabinets typically remain the same. The Spruce says cabinet refacing can be 30 to 50% cheaper than a replacement.

Most people call in professionals to change their cabinets. Cabinet replacement can be a do-it-yourself job, but it involves measuring and ensuring everything fits and is leveled appropriately. Homeowners who choose to reface their cabinets themselves may opt to paint or restain. Wood veneer or a new door and drawer panel installation can be complicated and is best left to qualified contractors.

— Metro Creative

Many factors can delay your renovation

Homeowners who decide to renovate one or more rooms in their homes may be excited about the changes that are in store. Even simple modifications to paint color or accessories can change the look of a space. Larger renovations can produce even more dramatic effects.

When contractors provide cost estimates, they may predict how long they expect the job to take from start to finish. It is impossible to plan for every scenario, however. Jobs may be delayed for various reasons, and it's rarely the fault of the contractor. Here are some reasons a renovation could experience snags along the way.

- Preexisting conditions: Opening up walls or removing flooring could reveal hidden problems. These include prior insect damage, leaks and water issues, asbestos, mold, or even pests. The presence of unforeseen issues will require remediation that

- can extend the project timeline.
- Schedule backup: Contractors often have busy schedules. When one job experiences delays, that causes a domino effect on others on the calendar. Homeowners should realize that the estimated start date of their own project is just an estimate and not necessarily set in stone.
- Lack of materials: Builders sometimes have difficulty procuring materials from vendors. Whether it's concrete or a special-order appliance, the contractor is at the mercy of the vendor. If there are shipping delays or other issues, the job will have to be pushed back. Many steps to a project hinge on the one before. For example, walls cannot be put up until electrical work and plumbing has been completed.
- Prior errors: Corrections may need to be made to what a previous contractor or even the homeowner did. Problems need to be fixed or

- they may compromise the look and safety of the project. Issues may arise if prior renovations were not done to code.
- Obtaining permits: The application process for obtaining permits can take anywhere from a few weeks to a few months depending on the municipality and the scale of the project. Long permit lead times can delay the start of the job.
- Weather: Mother Nature can affect everything from the availability of materials to the job itself, particularly if work is being done outdoors.
- Finances: The overall cost of the job may change, especially if issues arise during the work. If funds dry up, the project may stall. Homeowners should know that timelines are estimates and not set in stone.

— Metro Creative



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CUTTING DIMENSIONAL LUMBER with a chop saw is old hat to Wilder Yost of Smith & McClain Builders of Bristol. Before moving to Vermont, Yost worked in New York City focusing on high-end interior build-outs for retail clients.

Independent photo/Steve James

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Building studs

ALICE WHITE AND Don Monroe, owners of 32 South St. in Middlebury, “deconstructed” the old house that stood there since around 1820, instead of just demolishing it. This allowed them to preserve many salvageable parts for use in other buildings. The new house, designed by architect Elizabeth Herrmann of Bristol, will have geo-thermal heat pumps and all the latest insulation. White believes this is the first new house on South Street in 100 years.

Shown putting up the new dwelling on a recent afternoon are, left, Lukas Broughton of Middlebury and, top right, Wilder Yost of Lincoln. They are part of the team from Smith & McClain Builders of Bristol that is doing the job.

Independent photos/Steve James and John S. McCright



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Replacing gutters *isn't* flashy, but it's effective

Certain home renovation projects are more glamorous than others. A remodeled kitchen is sure to garner its share of “oohs and aahs,” while a newly paved driveway is much less likely to dazzle guests.

A gutter replacement is another job that might not have the wow factor. But fully functioning gutters are a must and can help to prevent potentially expensive roof damage. Gutters rarely draw attention, but homeowners can keep an eye out for signs that indicate gutters need to be replaced.

Signs gutters should be replaced

Various signs indicate it's time to replace existing gutters. Homeowners should act promptly if any of the following signs arise, as poorly functioning gutters can make it hard for water to get into the downspouts, ultimately pushing it backward and likely underneath roof shingles, where the result can be costly water damage.

- Peeling paint
- Cracks

- Pooling water in the gutter
- Mildew in the gutter, which can sometimes be seen even from the ground
- Water damage: Water damage on the gutter can be limited to certain spots and will be noticeable on the underside of the gutter
- Soffit damage
- Sagging gutters
- Detached gutters, which can be detached from other pieces or the house
- Rust

Who should replace gutters?

Many home improvements can be completed successfully by skilled do-it-yourselfers, but a gutter replacement is best left to the professionals. Homeowners who live in single-story homes may be able to replace gutters on their own, but the issues that can arise when gutters are not functioning at optimal capacity make this a job best suited to professionals, even in residences without high roofs.

Some gutters may be under a manufacturer's warranty, so homeowners can check to see if their gutters qualify for a free

upgrade. Experience is one of the best reasons to work with a professional gutter installation team. Experienced professionals can identify which gutters are the best fit based on a host of factors, including the pitch of the roof, local conditions and the size of the house. In addition, gutter installation requires the use of various tools that many DIYers may not have on hand, which can cut into the cost savings of doing the project yourself.

Homeowners also should not underestimate the challenges of working on ladders that are high up off the ground. Professionals are accustomed to such challenges, while DIYers may not be comfortable or used to climbing ladders with materials and tools in hand.

A gutter replacement is a worthwhile investment that can ensure rainwater efficiently and effectively runs through gutters and away from the roof. Leaving this task to the professionals can ensure the job is done right.

— Metro Creative



Transformation

BUILDING A HOUSE is an amazing thing to see. What starts as a pile of lumber and supplies is transformed by carpenters like Lukas Broughton, shown working on a project at 32 South St. in Middlebury, piece by piece into floors, walls, ceilings, windows, stairs, molding and fixtures until, finally, it becomes a house — and ultimately a home.

Independent photos/Steve James



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Small renovations **BIG** difference

Home renovation projects were high on homeowners' priority lists during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic. Throughout much of 2020, people across the globe were forced to spend much of their time at home as leaders and governments across the globe sought to prevent the spread of COVID-19. More time at home compelled millions of homeowners to invest more in their properties, thus sparking a renovation boom.

By early 2023, the renovation boom that marked the initial days of the pandemic appeared to have burst. In May 2023, the popular home improvement retailer Home Depot reported its sales had fallen by 4.5% in the first quarter of the year and that its income had fallen by more than 6% from the same period a year earlier. That marked the end of what Home Depot CEO Ted Decker characterized as "a three-year period of unprecedented growth" in the home improvement sector.

Home Depot's decline in sales was attributed to a number of factors, including a pivot among homeowners from large

projects to smaller renovations. Inflation and the looming threat of a recession have led many homeowners to emphasize smaller projects. With that in mind, the following are some small renovations that can have a big impact.

• **Storage addition:** Regardless of where storage is added, be it the kitchen or a home office or a laundry room, extra space to keep items out of view can dramatically alter the look of a home. Unused kitchen walls can be transformed with some inexpensive, easily hanged shelves, while some laundry pedestals with storage drawers can help keep washrooms clear of clutter.

• **Polish floors:** Elbow grease might be the biggest expenditure when cleaning hardwood floors. Some wood flooring experts advise homeowners to polish their floors once every two to four months depending on how much foot traffic the floors get. A fresh polishing can make floors look brand new and ensures dirt and dust are not hanging around as uninvited houseguests.

• **Paint:** Painting is another inexpensive

option for budget-conscious homeowners who want to update their homes. There's no shortage of places in a home, both inside and out, where a fresh coat of paint can make a statement without breaking the bank. Fading paint on bedroom walls and kitchen cabinets can be painted over with a fresh coat of the same color or even something more vibrant. Outside, apply a fresh coat to a wooden deck or paint over brick siding to create a whole new look.

• **Molding:** Crown molding can add a touch of elegance to any room. Rooms can be transformed in a single weekend with the installation of new or replacement crown molding. A simple molding installation is a task many do-it-yourselfers can handle on their own, while homeowners with less DIY experience may benefit from hiring a contractor to create a layered molding look.

Homeowners are pivoting away from costly renovations to more budget-conscious projects. Various less expensive undertakings can transform spaces at a fraction of the cost of more extensive renovations.

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We received quotes from Bristol Electronics and another well-known Vermont solar company, and were pleasantly surprised that Bristol had the better price, and we preferred Bristol's microinverter approach. Additionally, we were very pleased to learn that the panels and racking system were made in the USA with some components manufactured by a Vermont company. On top of this, the folks at Bristol were such a pleasure to work with. We can't remember a more pleasant experience when making a major investment.

We had a variety of questions which they happily addressed. Their knowledgeable staff was well versed with applicable regulations and requirements, building codes and even wind loading concerns. They truly went out of their way to make sure we were educated on the system and pleased with the installation.

This was a very rewarding experience which began with a goal of wanting to make our home fully renewably powered by working with a local team and culminated with meeting great members of our community, keeping our dollars local while also supporting other American renewable technology manufacturers. We found kindred spirits at BE and we can't recommend them highly enough!

Megan Nedzinski and Joshua Faulkner – South Starksboro, VT



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-Viveka Fox and Peter Macfarlane, Addison, VT



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Stephen and his crew encouraged my children's curiosity and made learning fun for them. Little things like making handprints in the cement of our solar system sparked talks about reducing your carbon footprint and how everyone can help, even children. The whole experience could not have been easier or better. Seeing the power meter run backwards is just icing on the cake."

Heather Shepard – Bristol

