

Builder/Architect

Feature
**Building's Brave
New World**

'Efficiency' in the News

TruexCullins
Architecture and Interior Design

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contents

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4 COVER STORY

TRUXCULLINS

Working out of beautifully restored digs on the Burlington waterfront and recently rechristened, TruexCullins has long been a leading name in Vermont architectural circles. In 1998, the 40-person firm added a separate interior design component and then, this summer, reorganized into five distinct "Studios," including Home and Interiors.

9

The Evolution of the Design Process

10

TruexCullins Interiors: 'The Final Touch'

11

Amoskeag Woodworking Continues to Expand

12 FEATURE

BUILDING'S BRAVE NEW WORLD

Innovations: New ways of thinking about home building.

15

Beeken Parsons —

Using Native Species to Create Unique Custom Furniture

17

Blazing Design, Inc. —

Don't Get 'Burned' by a Smoking Fireplace

21

Just for Laughs: Airline 'Safety'

DEPARTMENTS

2 from the publisher

3 art of architecture

18 and the envelope, please

24 news

27 product showcase

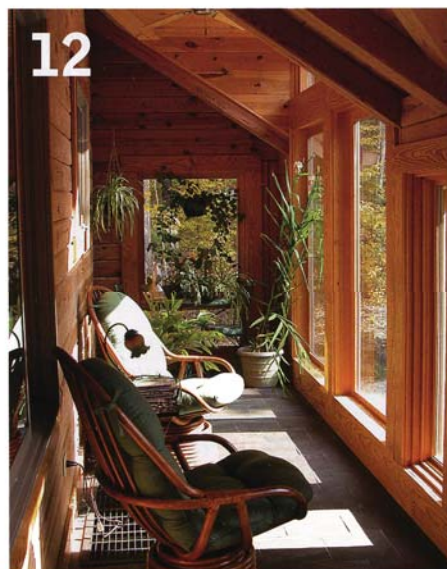


PHOTO BY WESTPHALEN PHOTOGRAPHY

ON THE COVER

The hallway in this home on the shore of Lake Champlain in Colchester was designed to also serve as a gallery to display artifacts collected by the owners. It was designed by TruexCullins' Home Studio and built by Three Seasons Builders, which has now morphed to become Clearwater Builders. Stuart Hamilton, designer on the project, said the home's exterior (inset) was conceived to suggest an airplane wing at the request of the owner, a former airline executive. Windows by Pella.



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This time, *Builder/Architect* is on the Burlington waterfront, in the stunning headquarters of TruexCullins, formerly Truex Cullins & Partners, and before that as Truex DeGroot & Cullins, and before that Truex & Alexander. It's clear they've been around for a while, four decades in fact.

And so have the buildings where their bustling firm is housed, a combination of two historic structures, the Old Stone Store and The Brick Warehouse. Remnants of both are incorporated into the two floors TruexCullins now occupies on lower Battery Street, creating a striking, rough-hewn backdrop for the modern amenities of a progressive design firm. And progressive they are, not only in use of such tools as 3-D renderings in the design process, but also in embracing the necessary concept of "green design" in many ways.

That's evinced in the use of native wood species from the site to create furniture and trim (see the article about Beeken Parsons), in the company's ongoing effort to help its members become LEED certified, and in projects like South Farms in Hinesburg, where TruexCullins is working with Reiss Building and Renovation to create a development with zero net energy usage via tight insulation, photovoltaics and geothermal wells.

For most of the firm's history, they were led by the two design stalwarts whose names the firm continues to bear: Bill Truex and Tom Cullins, both recently retired.



Bill Truex



Tom Cullins

Truex was instrumental in the conversion of downtown Burlington to the innovative Church Street Marketplace, where residents and visitors can pause, relax, mingle and interact rather than zip (or crawl) through in cars. It is a prototype of what city downtowns used to be, and can be in the future. Today, Truex is busy "chugging around North America on a boat" (exploring such waterways as the St. Lawrence Seaway, Mississippi River, Hudson River and Lake Champlain), according to Rolf Kielman, a partner in the firm and head of the Home Studio.

Cullins now has time to devote to his passions, including painting, drawing and photography. He spends winters in Vermont and summers in Greece, where he and his wife first met as architectural interns, and now own a tiny white house on a hillside overlooking the Aegean. "Tom was very active as a designer in Greece,"

says Kielman, "so we've had a working relationship with clients in the Mideast for a long while."

In addition to our lead article, read companion stories on how the firm develops their designs, using traditional methods as well as modern technology, and also how their Interiors Studio, led by partner Kim Deetjen, provides the "finishing touches" for projects by the Home Studio and all the other Studios within TruexCullins: Resorts, Workplace and Education.

Speaking of innovation, read our national feature (which appears in the more than 60 *Builder/Architect* editions around the country) on "Building's Brave New World."

Until next time,

Dick Nelson
Publisher

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TruexCullins

Architecture and Interior Design

By Stephanie Nelson

Look within the word architecture and you'll see the letters A-R-T.

At TruexCullins, housed in beautifully restored historic surroundings on Burlington's Battery Street, creating art is an integral part of what takes place every day.

"We're well rounded," says Lee Grutchfield, one of four architects who form the core of the firm's Home Studio. "We're not simply designers of buildings. We're also philosophers, artists, builders. I like to think all those elements show up in our finished product."

"We're also people of small egos," jokes Rolf Kielman, a

Home Studio colleague and one of five partners in the firm.

On this day, Grutchfield and Kielman, along with Dennis Willmott, are gathered in a spacious, sunlit conference room to discuss the firm's approach to architecture, as well as its recent reorganization and move toward increased specialization.

FORTY YEARS OF DESIGN LEADERSHIP

Now moving into its fifth decade, TruexCullins has gone through many permutations while evolving

This project by TruexCullins' Home Studio in Charlotte, built by Hubbard Construction, consists of the main house at left, and a guesthouse and garage at right. It was planned by the H. Keith Wagner Partnership, landscape architects, to "feel at home on the site," according to Rolf Kielman. The inset photo of the main residence reveals "the bones of the building exposed on the outside as well as the inside," according to Lee Grutchfield. The inset photo also shows a chimney consisting of South Bay Quartzite from Trowel Trades. Windows from Marvin.



PHOTO BY ROLF KIELMAN



PHOTO BY SUSAN TEARE

This TruexCullins design is an “agrarian inspired” combination workshop, garage and guest apartment at a home overlooking Lake Champlain in South Hero, also built by Three Seasons Builders, with windows from Marvin.

into one of the marquee names in Vermont’s architectural community. Founded in 1968 by Bill Truex and Gene Alexander, the firm soon welcomed Tom Cullins as a third partner. In the 1980s it was known as Truex DeGroot and Cullins, then, since the early 1990s, Truex Cullins & Partners.

Bill Truex, who retired in spring 2007, is perhaps best

I designed a home for one of my college roommates at Dartmouth, right on the Connecticut River. It took the form of a boat. The third floor was a really small loft, so we built a dumbwaiter so he could get his stuff up there more easily. We also had a steering wheel built, a captain’s wheel overlooking the river. It was built so well you could operate it with your pinky.

known for his role as point man in the bold reincarnation of Burlington’s main downtown thoroughfare into the Church Street Marketplace, providing Vermont’s largest city with a unique identity and bustling epicenter.

Tom Cullins, who retired in July of 2006, now divides his time between his two favorite places: Vermont (of course)

and the Aegean Sea. Among many milestones in a long career was his design of Saint Paul’s Cathedral, which was the winning entry in a national design competition. In the preface to a book celebrating his life’s work, Kielman describes the cathedral thusly: “Sitting on a bluff overlooking Lake Champlain, it is a kind of spiritual lighthouse that

— Rolf Kielman



PHOTO BY WESTPHALEN PHOTOGRAPHY

TruexCullins' Home Studio designed additions to both ends of this California Deck House. Shown here, the home's new kitchen, including Loewen windows, built by Peter Close.

marks the city's urban and natural edges."

The departure of this pair of stalwarts afforded the firm an opportunity to step back, take stock and make the changes needed to strategically position itself for the coming 40 years.

There was no need to move. TruexCullins is blessed with a unique working environment, combining views of Lake Champlain and Burlington's picturesque waterfront with a unique physical aspect that joins two pieces of Burlington history: The Old Stone Store and the contiguous Brick Warehouse. Occupying two floors of these conjoined structures, the firm has employed their design skills to create a striking work environment, where modern lighting and

computers co-exist with rough-hewn reminders of yesteryear.

There was also no need for a new name.

"One of our greatest benefits is our name," says Kielman. "It's easily recognizable, so we felt it was important to preserve that, even with the reorganization."

But the firm saw a pressing need to reconfigure its components in a modern, tele-connected world where the competition can as easily come from across the country as across the street.

So the decision was made to divide the firm into five separate "Studios," representing the spokes of the design wheel: Resort, Workplace, Education (universities, colleges, public and international schools), the Home Studio and Interiors (covering all four other studios). This division of labor allows each member of the firm to focus their energies on their area of greatest expertise, while also lending manpower and advice to members of the other studios.

"Being part of a larger firm makes us unique," says Grutchfield. "And it also gives us a significant advantage. We can use materials and techniques from our commercial work to enhance and

improve our residential projects."

Adds Kielman, "Clients today are more sophisticated. More and more, they want experts."

THE HOME STUDIO

Kielman, Grutchfield and Willmott, along with a fourth designer, Stuart Hamilton, gravitated to the Home Studio due to a passion for home design and a common experience.

"Everybody in the studio has built a house," says Willmott. "We've all built and made things."

Adds Kielman, "That practical knowledge has helped us forge credible relationships with our builder friends. And those

ongoing relationships are vital to our growth and success. We can also recognize when someone is really good at his craft.”

The four men also bring an array of creative and artistic strengths to the drawing table. Kielman majored in art as an undergraduate at Dartmouth. Hamilton was an English major at Middlebury. Willmott is an accomplished blues singer. Grutchfield is a musician as well. These varied backgrounds inform their design work, as does a network of relationships all have developed over the years with a variety of trades people, artists in their own right.

“Vermont is a vortex of people who can do anything,” states Willmott. “Wherever you look, you find fearless crafters of beautiful and practical objects.”

That same fearlessness and creativity shows through in many of the firm’s residential designs. Kielman recalls one of his favorites.

South Farms, a six-home, sustainable, “net zero energy” development on the edge of Hinesburg Village, is a collaboration between TruexCullins’ Home Studio and Reiss Building and Renovation, built within walking distance of the village. This home includes multiple south-facing Marvin windows, and solar cells adhered onto the standing seam roof, which are powered by the sun and a geothermal well, resulting in the burning of no fossil fuels.



PHOTO BY ROLF KIELMAN

Being part of a larger firm makes us unique. And it also gives us a significant advantage. We can use materials and techniques from our commercial work to enhance and improve our residential projects.

— Lee Grutchfield

“I designed a home for one of my college roommates at Dartmouth, right on the Connecticut River. It took the form of a boat. The third floor was a really small loft, so we built a dumbwaiter so he could get his stuff up there more easily. We also had a steering wheel built, a captain’s wheel overlooking the river. It was built so well you could operate it with your pinky.”

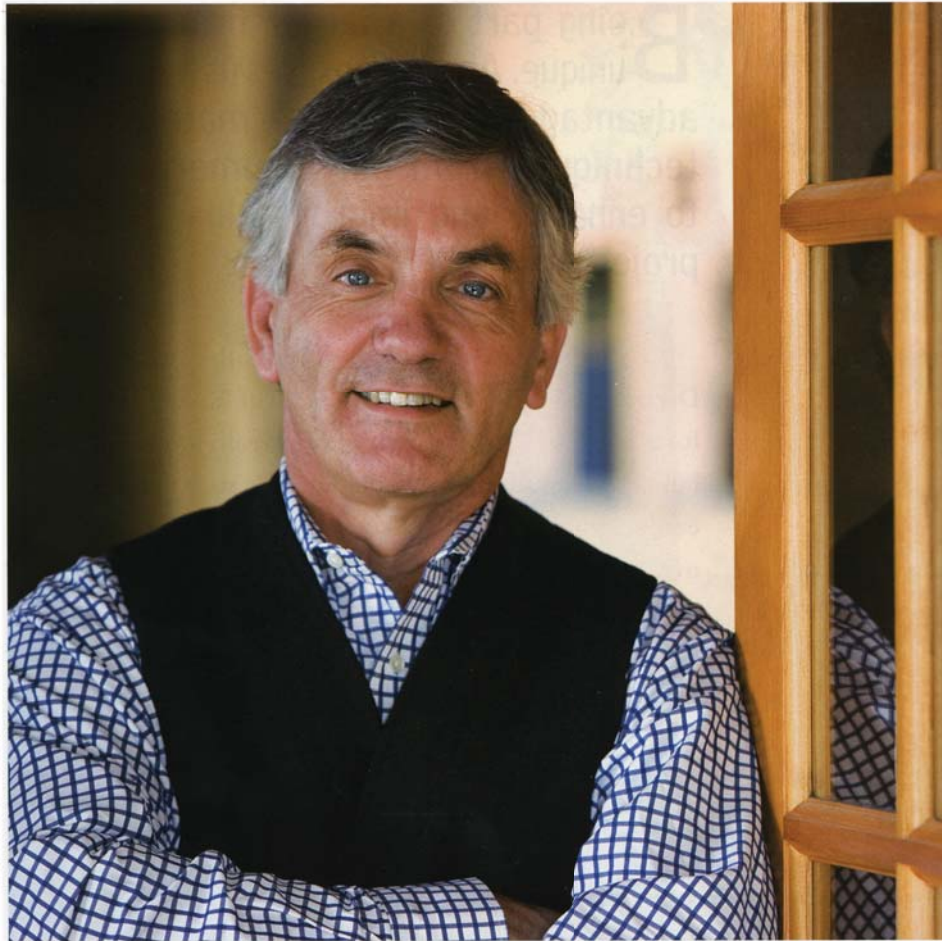
Another project, built for an airline executive and shown in accompanying photographs, is mostly stone and was designed to suggest an airplane wing.

COLLABORATION A KEY

Whatever the project, the Home Studio has developed a system for creating the best design possible for each individual client.

“We encourage the owner to hire a builder early on in the process,” says Kielman. “With the builder involved, the financial forecast is much more accurate (see related article). If alarm bells go off early on, we can make adjustments — make the house smaller or make the finish details less costly.

“It’s the same with the landscape architect. Keith Wagner and his firm are often part of our projects, starting with house placement. Keith is instrumental in making sure these homes are gently placed. Also, where will the septic system go? What trees do we keep, which ones will go? Where will we plant new vegetation and where will it go? It makes the product far



Rolf Kielman is one of five partners at TruexCullins and leader of the Home Studio.

and away better than we can make ourselves.

“So it’s a four-way collaboration among the architect, the builder, the landscape architect and the owner.”

TOWARD A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

TruexCullins, throughout its 40-plus-person firm, has also embraced the need for sustainability in all its projects, commercial, institutional and residential, local and global. A growing percentage of their staff is now LEED accredited, meaning they have taken the requisite training by the U.S. Green Building Council. That emphasis is evident in many ways, including a close working relationship with Efficiency Vermont, the state’s energy conservation utility.

They also work with clients and craftspeople to retrieve materials from the home site. Willmott notes, “Beeken Parsons (a woodworking firm based at Shelburne Farms) is great at turning cull wood into beautiful pieces of furniture.”

Kielman adds, “You’re seeing more and more of this



Lee Grutchfield, an associate and one of four architects who make up TruexCullins’ Home Studio.

idea, fostering local industry, local endeavors, using local materials.”

The Studio is also currently collaborating with Reiss Building and Renovation on South Farms, a six-

house development in Hinesburg that is designed to consume zero net energy. The homes are south facing with lots of glass on that side, and have solar panels affixed to the roof, as well as individual geothermal wells. “All the energy comes from the sun and the earth,” says Grutchfield. “The photovoltaics provide the power to run the geothermal units. The earth is the boiler.”

Adds Kielman, “With the many modern advances, the Home Studio remains true to the building traditions of the New England region. There is a practical ease in the design of our buildings, villages and towns. There is a calm blend of buildings and landscape and we strive to express that in our architecture.

“And most of all, the designs we do are for the people who hire us. It’s not all one flavor of ice cream. We’re helping them express it, yes, but it’s for them.”

Congratulations to TruexCullins on their selection as architect of the month. You may reach them at 209 Battery Street, Burlington, 05401, by phone at (802) 658-2775 or on the Web at www.truexcullins.com. ■

The Evolution of the Design Process

“You can imagine how useful this is for the homeowner,” says Rolf Kielman, as he leads a “virtual tour” of a home, being built on Shelburne Bay by Roundtree Construction, based on a design by TruexCullins’ Home Studio.

In the past decade, 3-D has become an essential tool for many architectural firms as they strive for better ways to help homebuilding clients achieve just the end product they seek.

“There’s an assurance that comes when homeowners really understand the project. They can have a knowledgeable dialogue with you during design and construction” often without ever needing to visit the job site.

Working 3-D models are now the final stage of the design process for the architects

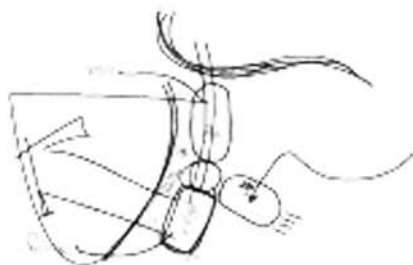
who make up the Home Studio.

“We always used to formulate our ideas in a sketchbook,” says Kielman, “and we still do that, followed by a floor plan and sometimes a cardboard model. But more and more, we’re moving into 3-D renderings very quickly, utilizing programs in house and also relying on consultants such as Lincoln Brown of upLink3d.”

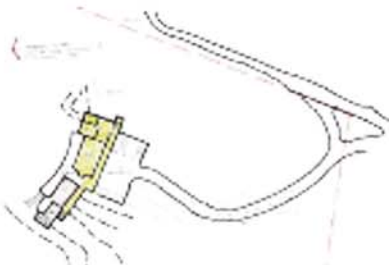
Dan Morris, President of Roundtree Construction, says use of 3-D aids the builder in many ways as well. “We’re often hired by the owner early in the design process, and people are usually looking for feedback all along the way. While the design is in a very early stage, we can give them budget feedback that helps inform the design process.

“The architect can transmit these 3-D models to us electronically and we can measure them in terms of concrete work, framing and so on, to develop a pretty detailed takeoff and range of probable costs. It saves a lot of potential problems down the road.”

The new tools make understanding a design simpler for everyone involved. “Everybody can look at a movie,” says Morris, “and that’s basically what these are. People don’t have to interpret floor plans and elevations. This software takes you around the building as though you were traveling on a moving platform. You can see it from above, below, all different angles. It’s all right there on the screen. It’s helpful for clients and it’s also very helpful for us.” ■



The design of this multigenerational home began with a sketch in Rolf Kielman’s sketchbook.



Next came a rough floor plan and site map.



After that, a cardboard model.



Then, a computer-generated 3-D model (by Lincoln Brown of upLink3d) of the two sections of the home, which includes a separate home for the younger generations when they visit, at right.



3-D modeling allows multiple views of a new-home design, like this one of home’s deck, including close-up looks at particulars, such as potential railings and possible stone and concrete flooring patterns.

TruexCullins Interiors: 'The Final Touch'

Creating a "home" is a journey with many steps. Find a site, develop a design, put in a foundation, followed by walls, windows, a roof. Before long, you have a building, a house. But making it a home takes something more. A final, vital step.

"To be well designed, a home has to function," says Kim Deetjen, Director of the Interiors Studio and one of five partners at TruexCullins. "It has to have cozy, comfortable spaces. That's where we come in."

Good interior design is what transforms a new residential building project into a home, making it complete.

"We're the final touch," says Deetjen. "Within our department, we have the expertise to custom design almost anything in a residence." Decorative lighting, chandeliers, towel bars, cabinet hardware, window treatments, custom furniture, you name it. The Interiors Studio has spent the past decade developing contacts and relationships with craftspeople and suppliers around Vermont and beyond, to find just the "right" item.

"We even work with a local weaver," says Deetjen, "to create hand-woven rugs to perfectly accent a room."

Over its four decades, TruexCullins had long offered an interior design component as part of its residential and commercial projects. Then, in 1998, the firm took the next step. "We realized that there wasn't anyone in the area providing interior design services in a significant way," says Deetjen, so they created Truex Cullins & Partners Interiors to work with the broader building community, including other architectural firms and direct collaboration with builders.

"It's not about creating our own 'look,'" Deetjen explains. "It's all about supporting and complementing the design intent of the architect, whoever that might be. It's a real art to complement the architecture and decorate with restraint. Some architects enjoy the detail. Others either don't have the time, or would rather rely on our expertise to support their design."

As more contractors move to design/



Kim Deetjen, a partner, leads an 11-person team at TruexCullins Interiors, supporting the efforts of all the other studios within the firm.

build, an interiors consultant can save them a lot of time and headaches. "Builders can get bogged down helping their clients

This home's striking décor was created by TruexCullins Interiors to reflect the tastes of the owners, with accents such as custom-crafted chandelier, oak flooring and cherry and hickory furniture. Custom windows from Marvin. The inset shows custom-designed oak cabinetry from Amoskeag Woodworking.



schlep around town. We can help by suggesting items for the builder to procure, or we can procure for them and have these items delivered to the site, numbered, labeled and on time to fit in with the construction schedule.

"Some clients have a lot of involvement. Others, particularly those building vacation homes, would rather just have us handle it while keeping them informed of the progress, the price. In those cases, we deliver and install everything so when they arrive at their new home, it's complete."

Within the offices of the Interiors Studio, rife with fabric swatches and carpet samples, Deetjen is supported by an 11-member team, including licensed interior designers and an architect, all with a common goal Deetjen encapsulates thusly: "Working together with clients, we are able to blend our passions to create dynamic spaces that reflect their vision, capture their personality and embody their values and style. We strive to make a difference in their lives, creating warm, pleasing spaces to enhance the way we live, work and play." ■