





# *Truex Cullins*

## Hospitality Studio

### VISIONS OF PLACE

At Topnotch Resort in Stowe, there's a unique sense of place. A natural flow leads guests from the interior to the exterior—from the lobby through the casual lounge to the patio with its ping-pong table and beyond, to the two pools and an outdoor dining area. From inside, the looming view of Mount Mansfield is unadulterated; guests who stroll the manicured grounds after dark will find their eyes drawn to the main building, with its warm and inviting lighting. ▶

The Roost at Topnotch Resort  
in Stowe, Vermont.



Left: The new main entrance to Topnotch Resort. Above: Après Bar at Topnotch Resort. Below right: The welcoming guest desk at Topnotch Resort.

That integration of the two components, inside and out, was carefully orchestrated by the TruexCullins hospitality studio, which has been responsible for a number of renovations on the property. Most recently, the firm renovated the lobby and lounge, creating a space that—despite a newly smaller footprint—now feels more welcoming.

The Roost, where guests can enjoy breakfast, an afternoon nibble, happy hour, or dinner, is

a family-oriented gathering spot, an objective that’s reinforced by its central focus: a unique shuffleboard dining bar built by Shelburne-based Beeken Parsons. The area is a marked contrast to the old, more-formal dining room, with a children’s dining area sequestered down the hall.

### A Unifying Approach

“We tried to break down the barriers in this design,” says firm principal and interior designer Kim Deetjen. Those are both physical and visual—Kim says the structural design and window placement were intended to “celebrate” the view of Mansfield, adding that the firm worked with the landscape architects at Wagner Hodgson to ensure the continuity of various design elements throughout the landscape as well.

That unifying approach is the hallmark of the TruexCullins hospitality studio. “There’s no ‘here are the interiors, and here’s the architecture,’” says associate and project manager Keith Nelson. “It’s totally intertwined.” ▶



Kim Deetjen, firm principal and interior designer.



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Bleu Northeast Seafood Restaurant located in the Courtyard Marriott Burlington Harbor Hotel.



Before a single sketch is drawn for a new project, Keith and Kim take time to experience the location as guests. If it's a hotel, they'll stay a night or two to get the feel of the building's functionality and circulation. They'll also be mindful of the locale, because the same sense of place that's behind the farm-to-table movement has spread across the world of hospitality (Keith says that even larger corporations such as Mar-

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riott—with whom the team has worked—seek to establish a place-specific feeling in their hotels).

That genuine focus on place and materiality—and thorough knowledge of both—pops up repeatedly, as when Keith mentions Timber, a Bangor, Maine, restaurant they recently renovated. In a quick aside, he adds, “Bangor was the timber capital of the world at one point in the late 1800s.”

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### Attuned to Local Markets & International Design Trends

The overarching goal is to welcome guests back—whether travelers or natives—repeatedly, with each visit feeling novel. Keith says whether it's a restaurant or a hotel, there should be multiple "zones, so you can come back and always experience something new."

That might translate, for example, to a bar that also serves as a chef's bar with a wood-fired oven; on one visit, patrons might just have a drink, but on a second visit, perhaps they'll enjoy a pizza there. It's also a way to support food and beverage functionality—given today's real estate prices, owners want to take full advantage of the spaces they've got. Kim and Keith routinely acknowledge that need by creating dual- or even triple-function rooms.

So where many hotels have a breakfast room that's only used for a couple of hours a day, at the Hotel Jackson, for example, the breakfast room becomes a library in the afternoon. At night, the sofa table can be transformed into six cocktail tables and guests can



enjoy a fire, games, and movies. Alternatively, at New Hampshire's Wentworth Hotel, they created a "pantry" with pocket doors that close it off after breakfast, giving the space a decidedly residential feel.

It's an approach they've used to advantage over the past decade-plus, at locations as varied as Spur Restaurant in Jackson Hole, Wyoming; Casa Madrona Hotel and Spa in Sausalito, California; the Portland (Maine) Harbor Hotel; Vermont National Country Club in Burlington; Teton Springs Lodge and Spa in Victor, Idaho; Green Mountain Suites in South Burlington; Burlington's Hotel Vermont; and Bleu Northeast Seafood in Burlington. Their latest project is a hotel renovation on Longboat Key, near Sarasota, Florida; they're also getting started on one in Durango, Colorado.

Developer Chuck DesLauriers has collaborated with the TruexCullins hospitality studio on multiple projects, including Hotel Vermont and Bleu. Chuck says he routinely finds they're equally in tune with local markets and international design trends. He applauds the group's technical skills, from budgeting to 3D imaging; with up to six architects and six interior designers available, they're able to bring a great deal to the project table. ▶

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“Everyone involved in the team understands the design and what it’s going to look like before construction even starts,” says Chuck. He says that Juniper, the Hotel Vermont restaurant, has brought in twice the anticipated revenue since opening, which he attributes as much to the skills of his chefs and service team as to the space’s layout and visual qualities.

### Anticipating Needs with a Mutual Focus

Sensory detail is something Keith and Kim strive to incorporate. Says Keith: “We always want to make sure that the senses are part of the experience,” and Kim adds that “it’s no good when colors have nothing to do with the locale or the building, or there’s a total disconnect when you walk in.”

Kim and Keith are always the first point of contact, and say they stay with each project until the door opens for business. Like any good partners, they anticipate clients’ needs and often know what the other is thinking before a word is said.

He’s more practical minded, the one who will locate a local craftsman to construct affordable light fixtures when the client hoped to import them from Italy, as focused on the tiniest details in a chair leg as he is a building exterior.

She’s worked with architects her entire career and has a profound respect for the relationship between architecture and setting. Their mutual focus and passion for their work, says Kim, is recognized and appreciated by clients who are often repeats, like Chuck, with whom they form personal relationships. That, says Keith, has led to increased efficiency in their work.

“We go to a different project,” he says, “and we’re approaching it with something we’ve learned from what we’ve done. So we’re always building upon what we’ve done before, but we’re also looking toward something that’s a new vision in a different place. ✿”

### TruexCullins Architecture + Interior Design

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