

OPEN TO POSSIBILITIES

*Private places, family spaces
in Jericho home*

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When Michael and Beth Hopwood decided to build their home, they found a piece of land in the right town (Jericho) and with views to die for. The only downside was that the lot had lots of rocky ledge and it needed to be accessed by a long, winding road of hairpin bends. Nonetheless, they thought the lot could work, given the right team of architect and craftsmen.

"We were scared but we knew what we wanted," Beth Hopwood said. "We have three active boys, so we wanted a house that had flow, where you could be together but have some private spaces."

A ladder leads to a loft in one of the boy's bedrooms. The Hopwoods opted for a loft in each bedroom instead of attic space.



The family's kitchen (above) is lined with shaker-style cupboards topped by Vermont slate counters. Custom-built shelves dividing the living room from the dining area create a cozy and organized reading area (right).



This was the mission the couple gave their chosen crew, architect Brian Mack from Birdseye Building and craftsmen from Red House builders. The result is a mainly open-plan house enhanced with cozy private nooks and features that nod in the direction of the couple's boisterous and growing three boys: Kellen, 10; and twins Bo and Quinn, 7.

The key to their approach is a kitchen that sits at the heart of the home and is the first area that greets a visitor's view on entering through the formal front door. The orientation grew out of a discussion the Hopwoods had with their crew about how they lived as a family.

"We knew it was incredibly unusual, but the more we thought about it the more we knew it could work for us, because the kitchen is the hub and it really does flow," Beth said.

The kitchen is designed as a straightforward galley with a central aisle that gives Beth access to cabinets and counters on either side. The gas range is at the end of the area.

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While the kitchen overlooks a formal dining area, it is the breakfast bar looking into the kitchen that gets most use, the Hopwoods said. Rather than using stools, the Hopwoods had their crew install four seats on metal pivots that swing in and out of place. The only downside to this arrangement was that the family found the seats left their feet dangling, so Tom Pickler of Red House devised a neat solution: He put a metal railing along the base of the breakfast bar at the perfect height for both adult and child feet. "It's little things like that that make the house comfortable to live in," Beth said.

Accommodating features

The open-plan design gives the house's first floor a bright airiness that's enhanced by numerous windows with glorious views of Mount Mansfield and Camels Hump. Michael Hopwood said the couple had looked carefully at areas where they could reduce windows for both energy efficiency and cost savings. However, the needed changes have not detracted from the overall impression of light.

Another key to the Hopwoods' design requirements was their focus on the family. This is evident in the sight lines, which enable busy parents to see virtually all corners of the first floor, whether they're standing in the kitchen, the dining room or the living room. Another important family oriented aspect was flooring.

"We always liked light floors, but we needed a durable wood because light floors get scratched up," Beth said.

That consideration helped the couple opt for Brazilian cherry, a rich, dark wood that contrasts well with the white woodwork and butter-yellow walls of the first floor.

The living room flows naturally from the dining and kitchen area with two steps down, giving a visual and minimal physical separation. Here again the couple's request for group space and separate space is cleverly met by the room's arrangement. At one end a couch and chairs make for comfortable TV viewing as a family, while the other side of the room provides space for board games and creative play. Beth, aware of how quickly clutter and mess can overtake a family's communal areas, asked for plenty of shelf storage where the boys' books and building blocks can easily be put away.

The built-in gas-fired hearth provides a pleasant ambience to the room and represents a compromise dictated again by family needs: While the Hopwoods preferred a wood-burning model, two of the boys are susceptible to asthma, so a wood stove was out of the question.

These days it's common for families to position a flat-screen TV above the fireplace. But the Hopwoods chose to locate their TV to one side of the hearth at a height they find more comfortable for viewing. They used the space above the mantel for a unique feature that nods at Michael's work with technology: a picture frame that displays a never ending series of family photographs.



The Hopwoods' contemporary farmhouse in Jericho (above) has amazing views of Camels Hump and Mount Mansfield. Beth and Michael Hopwood (right) and their sons (from left) Quinn, 7, Kellen, 10, and Bo, 7, sit on the back steps. The family enjoys pastoral and mountain views from a screened porch (bottom). A window seat (below) was created in the living room to add a cozy element and storage space.



In solitude

The living room area ends with a small office for Beth — with a door that can be closed. There's another private space on the other side of the front door where the Hopwoods have made a small sunny sitting room for those times when someone feels the need to close out the rest of the world. The third private space on the first floor is Michael's office, which features a desk specially made by Red House to store all the computer cables and other wires.

Beyond the private sitting room and dining area is one of the most frequently used passageways — the hall to the mudroom, where the family usually enters. It also has a good variety of storage space: hooks and pegs for coats and jackets; shelves and cubbies for boots, gloves and other outdoor accessories. The Hopwoods have added an ingenious element of their own to the area: two metal towel heaters that have plenty of use as glove- and hat-warmers in the winter or drying racks for swimwear.

The second floor is laid out in two wings around a central family area. The stairs open into a wide hallway centered around another of Red House's special features — a high, cushioned reading nook where the whole

family can snuggle to read bedtime stories and watch stars appearing in the night sky through the bank of narrow windows above.

The master bedroom with ensuite bathroom is at one end of the hall, and the boys' rooms are at the other end. Each of the children's rooms is very simply laid out and sparsely furnished, but a little loft accessed by a wooden ladder that Red House put in each room adds excitement.

"That's the place they don't have to clean up," Michael said.

Thoughtful and quirky details such as the lofts make the Hopwoods' house a warm, family affair. While Beth and Michael have clearly been the driving force behind such a kid-friendly home, the couple are clear that a house does not become a home without a crew of skilled craftsmen.

"In hindsight, it's the communications and relationship you establish with your builders that's critical. These guys are proactive, and they come over all the time," Michael said of the Red House crew. "It makes living in this home and owning a house so much less stressful."



A view from the Hopwoods' master bedroom loft shows off the elegant simplicity of their bedroom furnishings (above). The building crew from Red House Inc. (left) still pop by for regular visits. Twelve-year-old Tory (top left), one of two family dogs, relaxes in the hallway leading to the dog room and the mud room.