

Story by Julie Moir Messervy



VERMONT GARDENS

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Tiny Hideaways

From a hen house to a writer's retreat, a photo tour of unique garden buildings across Vermont

PHOTO BY JULIE MOIR MESSERVY



I'VE LONG BEEN a collector of little houses. As a young girl, I'd make stick forts in the woods, set up house under the baby grand piano, and imagine inhabiting the belfry of my local church. I've always yearned for a secret hideaway in my life—a tiny house of my own. Even today, traveling the back roads to and from my studio in Saxtons River, I find myself slowing down as I drive past two special huts: one that resembles a Greek open-air *tempietto* (little temple), and the other, a more contemporary cabin that houses a workshop, a bed and a woodstove. Just as when I was a child, I wistfully envision moving in and making myself at home.

So imagine my delight when I visited Randolph Technical Center last spring and spied a little post-and-beam structure that the carpentry students were in the process of building. It was the perfect size and shape—10 by 12 feet—and even had a 12:12 pitched roof, a 45-degree angle to match the barn-like gable on our house. And I knew just where to put it—down the hill across our two-acre pond. At a fundraiser auction, we outbid the next highest bidder and became the proud recipients of the “Lake House.”

Next we needed to put a roof on and clad the building. For this I turned to Westminster West master carpenter Bryan Shaw (shaw1@vermontel.net), who knew just what to do. Bryan installed a sheet-metal roof and clad the structure in shiplap pine, which will take on a lovely patina over time. He made screens to fit each bay of the timber frame and a custom screen door that matches the clean lines of the building. At last, I had my dream house—a tiny, airy retreat open to the sights and sounds of nature—perfect for private reverie, a companionable chat, or a delicious afternoon nap.

What follows is a collection of tiny houses, all designed and built by Vermont architects, carpenters and builders. Some are functional; others are pure fun. After all, who doesn't want a room of one's own?

Inset (top of page): On investigation, the *tempietto* turned out to be the disembodied cupola of a 19th-century mansion. Its owner acquired it after the building, a private residence in Bennington, was torn down.



Who says an idyllic retreat needs to be elaborate or expensive? Robert Swinburne of Halifax built a simple 2 x 4 frame, wrapped it in insect screen, and used parachute cord to suspend the bed from the clear polycarbonate roof. His Fern House appears to float atop a sea of ferns; www.swinburnearchitect.com.



Built primarily of salvaged materials, David Pill's hen house in East Charlotte fits perfectly into a landscape designed in accordance with the principles of permaculture and a low carbon footprint; www.pillmaharam.com.



Trip Richardson designed and built this little house in Grafton as a personal retreat and studio for metalworking and sculpture. He used wood culled from the property, electrified the building for his power tools, and installed a woodstove and comfortable leather armchair.



This classical Colonial toolshed in Woodbury, designed by Pat Pritchett, provides functional storage for all the tools and equipment of an avid gardener; www.vermontvernaculardesigns.com.



Students in the Yestermorrow Community Design/Build course created this mountaintop teahouse in Roxbury. It was designed by architect Mac Rood; www.yestermorrow.org.



Twenty-five years ago, Andy Reichsman acquired 100 double-hung window sashes from a school that was replacing them. Today, some of those windows form the south wall of the cabin Andy built in Marlboro as an art studio for his daughter.



Rolf Kielman designed this wood-and-stone structure on the grounds of Vermont Law School to be both sheltering and transparent; www.truexucollins.com.



This Waitsfield timberframe teahouse by Birdseye Design makes the most of a beautiful view in a wooded setting. It features cedar panels set within the timberframe, copper standing-seam on a cross-gabled roof, and clerestory glass set within the steep gables; www.birdseyebuilding.com.

This charming outhouse, designed by Richard Gamache of Swanton, is one of several small garden structures in South Burlington's Vermont Garden Park.





The H. Keith Wagner Partnership designed this water-harvesting shed as part of the new greenroof at Fletcher Allen Hospital. The V-shaped roof directs rainwater to holding tanks that can store up to 150 gallons; www.hkw-p.com.



This sauna-cum-teahouse, tucked away on the flanks of the Green Mountains south of Middlebury, is a lovely example of global design, local execution. Elizabeth Herrmann architecture + design took inspiration from the owners' travels in Japan and Finland, and Northern Timbers built the structure of green wood from a local mill; www.eharchitect.com.



Gossens Bachman's multi-purpose Adamant pond house built of unfinished native materials reflects the client's appreciation of craftsmanship and interest in Japanese design; www.gbarchitecture.com.

The Julie Moir Messervy Design Studio, based in Saxtons River, provides full-service landscape design for residential and institutional clients and also offers Home Outside Design, an online design service for small properties and budget-conscious homeowners; (802) 869-1470, www.jmmds.com



The crossed Viking horn finials atop the roof peaks of this East Dorset structure announce the Scandinavian influence that inspired designer Marta Elise Johansen. The slate-roofed, cedar-sided building contains a studio for art or writing, a sauna, and a sleeping loft; www.martajohansen.com.