

Builder/Architect

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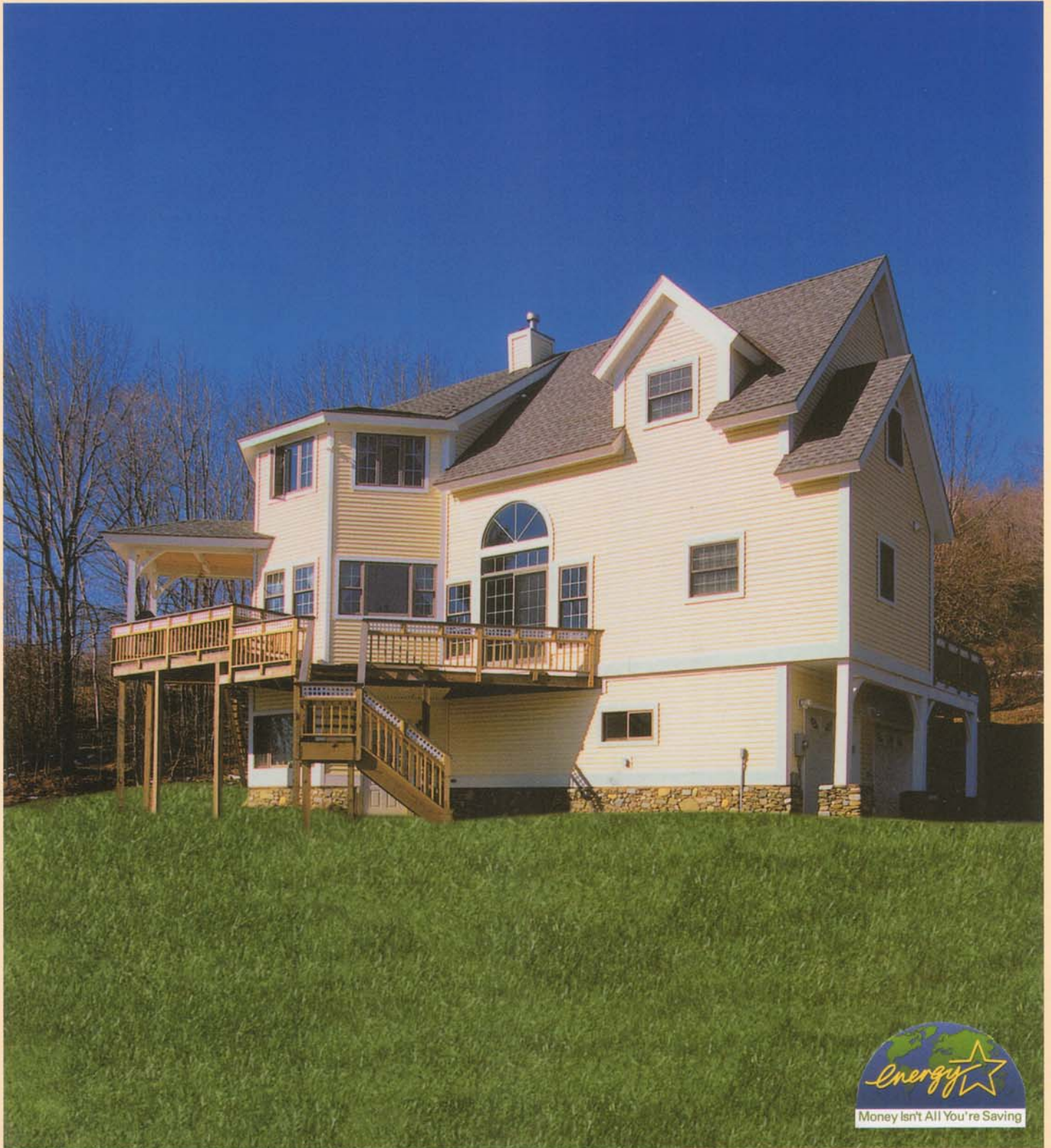


Dover Building, Inc.
“A Timber Frame Company”

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By Stephanie Nelson



This West Dover home, built for Larry Tollen of Dover Building, bears an Energy Star plaque for efficient construction. The Timber Frame home earned the label for the following traits: a super insulated shell, consisting of structural insulated panels; tight air sealing, high-performance low-E Marvin Integrity windows (from WW Building Supply); mechanical ventilation; Energy Star appliances; and enhanced low-voltage lighting. Photo by Carolyn Bates.



A spacious kitchen for the serious cook is the focal point of many Dover Building projects, including that same Energy Star home. The deep-red custom cabinets provide a striking counterpoint to the beauty of Timber Frame joinery. The open kitchen layout, made possible by post-and-beam construction, lends itself to entertaining. Energy Star appliances from Star Electric. Photo by Carolyn Bates.

Step inside the yellow farmhouse on Route 100 in West Dover, a mile or so south of the entrance to the Mount Snow Ski Area, and you'll generally encounter a bustle of activity.

As headquarters for both Dover Building, Inc., southern Vermont's premier Timber Frame home building company, and North Real Estate, Inc., there's always something going on—

land sales, home or apartment rentals, maybe a couple up from New York seeking to build a half-million-dollar vacation retreat; perhaps a local homeowner who wants a Timber Frame addition on his existing home; all that and more.

Downstairs, in her office, is Sharon Vilcins on the phone lining up a delivery of materials to the job site of Dover

Building's next Timber Frame project. Upstairs, her husband Ken, is at his drawing board, finalizing plans for that frame. Over in the corner, Larry Tollen talks with a prospective homeowner he's met at a trade show.

And overseeing it all, Bob North, Sharon's dad, who started both companies three decades ago when he left the state of Virginia and life as an oil com-

pany manager for ARCO.

"I figured there had to be something better," states North, "so we moved up here. Living in Vermont is a real treat."

Upon arriving at Mount Snow, where North and his wife Margaret had skied, he established North Real Estate, whose signs are now seen on properties up and down the southern Rt. 100 corridor, and also started building modular and panelized houses as Dover Building, Inc.

"My dad built spec homes and sold them through the real estate company," says Sharon. "Building, real estate and property management all go hand in hand. That's how it all began."

North had also purchased a farm on Rt. 100, which came with 10 acres of land on which he built both the yellow farmhouse that's now home to both companies, as well as the North Commercial Center.

Today, Dover Building is construct-

ing four to six exquisitely crafted, custom-designed Timber Frame homes annually. In addition, at their cutting operation, up the hill at the Mount Snow Airport, are two airplane hangars filled with either finished frames or rough beams of hemlock, Eastern white pine or other species, waiting to be transformed. These frames will not only become the shell of Dover Building, Inc. homes, but another 12 to 20 will be shipped to places such as

A traditional handcrafted fieldstone fireplace, designed by Ken Vilcins, anchors this soaring living room in a Deerfield Valley Timber Frame home. Photo by Gary Hall.



Crested Butte, CO, and Westchester County, NY, to be erected by a Dover Building crew, then finished off by local contractors.

Most recently, the company has designed and built a 3,000-square-foot Timber Frame home for Tollen himself (shown in accompanying photos) that bears the silver Energy Star plaque outside the front entrance, signifying the home has been built to the highest possible standards for energy efficiency, a practice they plan to continue. The criteria for an Energy Star home include: a well-insulated shell (a given with Timber Frame construction), air sealing, mechanical ventilation, high-efficiency heating and cooling, and high-efficiency appliances and lighting.

"We are committed to the Energy Star program," states Sharon Vilcins. "We believe it's a very important part of every Dover Building project. Although we don't require every client to sign on, it's our goal to build every home in an energy-efficient way, and hopefully to Energy Star standards."

But that's getting ahead of the story.

After a successful decade during the 1980s, home building—vacation or otherwise—nosedived. So Dover Building went on a four-year hiatus before being reborn in its current-day form when Bob North traveled, well, north...to Duxbury to visit Sharon and Ken in their new 5,000-square-foot Timber Frame home, which Ken had built himself while working for a Timber Frame company in that area.

"I wanted to get back into building houses," says North, "and I realized Timber Frame was a great way to do it. From both an aesthetic and energy-efficiency standpoint, you just can't beat it."

Fortunately, in Ken they had an in-house expert right at hand. "I'd been handling chain saws since I was 12," he says. "I cut wood as a summer job up to age 17. I also worked summers as a carpenter during high school and college. I'd even helped build a Timber Frame.

"When I was 12, my dad, mom, sister and I moved to Duxbury, into a one-room camp with no power, electricity or running water, where we lived while we were building our house. But we had no place to store our furniture, so we timber framed a barn in a weekend. It was an Amish-style barn-raising. We cut the spruce logs ourselves and dragged them out of the woods by whatever means necessary and built a two-story barn. We notched it with



The Timber Frame in each Dover Building home is designed and then custom-cut for that particular client. Ken Vilcins works closely with each owner to meet their specific requirements. The unique joinery in this octagonal dining room is a perfect example. Photo by Gary Hall.

axes. It was sort of makeshift, with metal brackets."

So, several years later, when he had a chance to work for a local Timber Frame company, he jumped at it.

"It was easy for me to understand the concept. One summer, we put up nine frames and did the enclosure, or panels. After a while, I thought, 'I should be doing this myself.'" He did, building his own Timber Frame home.

When Bob North came to visit, and saw the beauty of Ken and Sharon's home, Ken was recruited to come south and help restart Dover Building as a Timber Frame company. Today, he runs an experienced crew of frame cutters, many of whom have been together since 1996. Sharon soon followed, getting a job in her specialty, banking. However, it wasn't long, recounts North, before "we convinced her to come and work in the office. Now we couldn't get along without her. She coordinates payments, contracts, interfaces with suppliers and subcontractors. She's also the liaison between the cus-

tomers and the building company."

Another player in the equation, Larry Tollen, was already on board, working in real estate. When Dover Building restarted, he began helping with sales and marketing—and creating an important liaison between North Real Estate and Dover Building, Inc.

As the company's informational brochure points out, "Dover Building, Inc., in association with North Real Estate, is able to offer real estate sales, vacation rentals, property management, land acquisition and development... In southern Vermont, we can assist you in finding the site for your Timber Frame home, even in renting or buying a home in the meantime."

Tollen recalls the company's reentry into home building.

"Around 1995, we felt the market was ready for spec building. So we had someone else cut the frame and built our first post-and-beam. That was sold to a Connecticut couple who are still there. From then on, it's continued to grow. The word spread and we got lots



The crew of Dover Building, Inc. at their frame cutting and storage facility near the Mount Snow Airport. From left: Sharon Vilcins, Bob North, Ryan North, Mike Sarlo, Mike Davis, Jason Depaulois, Ken Vilcins, Robert North III and Larry Tollen. Photo by Carolyn Bates.

of inquiries. Sometimes we'd build on spec, but the house would sell before we finished it.

"The aesthetics of post-and-beam really lend themselves to what we sell in this resort area," Tollen notes. "When people come up here, they want a look inside that's totally different from what they're used to at home. And every client gets a design that's perfect for them.

"Every frame is hand-cut to order. We sit down and work out a plan with them. We offer them a large variety of wood species. Then Ken does the final design on the frame.

"No job is too small or too big for us to handle. We've done jobs over 8,000 square feet. Others are more modest. We've done 1,000-square-foot getaway homes. We've done additions. We've bid on some commercial jobs. Right now, we have 15 or 16 Timber Frame homes here in the valley. We still do conventional building as well, but 90 percent of what we do is Timber Frame. Sometimes people want half Timber Frame and half stick-built."

According to Bob North, as business has grown, so has the company.

"Right now, we have three crews, plus a fourth, which is the cutting operation."

In fact, the cutting operation has now outgrown the two airplane hangars and Vilcins is constructing a facility twice the size to serve as office, design space and cutting facility, while retaining the other two buildings for storage. "I'll be able to cut two frames at once now," he says, eyes gleaming. "We'll be able to cut two frames a week, if needed."

While they are producing more Timber Frames, however, each is still done with the same precision and care.

As Tollen explains, "All the cutting is done by hand, using mortises, chisels—the old-fashioned way. We feature curved knee braces and chamfered (or beveled) edges for a softer look. It's more work, but we do it. It looks better. And when we deliver a frame, every piece has been sanded and hand-rubbed twice with tung oil and then with pennefin oil, a rosewood derivative. At that point, there's no more the customer has to do."

And that's not all.

"When post-and-beam homes are put together properly, they will be up to 10 times more stable than conventional stick-built. These frames should be here 500 years. Post-and-beam is one of the oldest styles around. Plus, you get wide-open soaring spaces, with no internal load-bearing walls. If someone wants a wide-open design, they can

have it. Our standard ceiling is nine feet high. And with the styrofoam panels, the acoustics are great. The high ceilings, the wood...music seems to fill up the space."

Then, as Tollen was planning his own home, the most recent piece of the puzzle, energy efficiency, fell into place.

Jeff Gephart, who coordinates the Energy Star home program with builders in Vermont, recalls, "Larry called us a number of times during the planning and construction and picked our brain. We told him what it took to make it an Energy Star home." Gephart also advised them on how to translate those building criteria into around \$1,400 in rebates, which is standard for an Energy Star home.

Now Dover Building plans to work with future customers to make sure most, if not all, of the homes it builds bear that Energy Star plaque by the front door. After all, if a home is going to last for decades or centuries, why not be saving on heating costs and electricity all that time?

Congratulations to Dover Building, Inc. on their selection as Builder of the Month. You may reach them at P.O. Box 8, West Dover, 05356, by calling 1-877-464-8815, by e-mail at info@doverbuilding.com, or visit their Web site at www.doverbuilding.com.