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## No Artificial Ingredients

Architect **Joan Heaton** honors the Adirondacks region with wood-based designs that are rooted in nature and history

By Matt Alderton

Joan Heaton grew up in the Green Mountains of Vermont, which are bordered on the west by Lake Champlain and Lake George, beyond which are the Adirondack Mountains of New York. In this region, the maple syrup is especially sweet, and so are the trees, which cover the landscape like coniferous carpeting.

When one considers where she's from, it's easy to see how Heaton got to where she is. After graduating in 1990 from Cornell University's College of Architecture, Art, and Planning, Heaton worked for a number of local architecture firms before starting her own firm, Joan Heaton Architects, in Bristol, Vermont, in 1996. Specializing in residential design, her one-woman practice is firmly grounded in the mountainous region she calls home. And that means working with wood. "I have an affinity for wood construction," Heaton says. "Being from Vermont, I'm obviously familiar with wood; I work with it on a daily basis."



### New Haven: The Jumping-Off Point

Heaton's first project as president of Joan Heaton Architects was the renovation of a historic schoolhouse in New Haven, Vermont. Built in 1865 and restored in 1997, the two-story schoolhouse was converted under Heaton's direction into a modern two-family home. With the help of her husband, who served as the project's builder and developer, Heaton retained many of the building's original exterior features, such as its bell tower and trim, and rehabilitated many of its interior finishes, including its wood floors and plaster walls. In addition, she installed cellulose insulation, radiant heat, and storm windows to make the schoolhouse comfortable for modern living.

"The schoolhouse project was my jumping-off point," Heaton says. "It was a chance to contribute to the greater surroundings by preserving that building. That's what I like about my job: not only do you get to make a nice place in an immediate spot, but you also get to contribute to a larger landscape."

### The Great Camps

It's Heaton's desire to contribute in small ways to large landscapes that eventually attracted her to the Adirondacks, where wealthy New Yorkers famously flocked in the latter half of the 19th century to build extravagant summer homes—family compounds of cabins called "Great Camps." "The tradition of summering in the Adirondacks continues today and accounts for some of my clientele," Heaton says. "The Great Camp tradition sometimes uses whole trees in the building, and it often uses local lumber and stone. I'm drawn to those natural materials."

Heaton secured her first Adirondacks project in 2008, when her website caught the eye of a client in Westport, New York. After obtaining her New York architecture license, Heaton designed a home for that client in 2009. The residence, which Heaton calls the Lake Champlain Home, includes several sustainable features such as FSC-certified wood and triple-glazed windows for energy efficiency. Typical of Adirondacks architecture, it also features shingle, stone, and timber details, including a locally sourced stone fireplace and a handcrafted timber porch, pergola, and floor system. "There's a respect for the environment inherent in the Great Camps, and that's something I try to pay homage to," Heaton says.

### Age-Old Materials, Modern Style

Sustainability constantly manifests itself in Heaton's work in the form of careful site selection, small footprints (some of her projects are less than 1,000 square feet), recycled and reused materials, and renewable energy sources. A quintessential project, for instance, is her "Modern Cabin," an 800-square-foot guest cottage that she intends to use as a modular home prototype. Consisting of a large open space that sleeps six and gathers light from all sides, the home is energy-efficient because it's small and set up for solar photovoltaics. What's more, it occupies a previously developed site: Heaton dismantled the cabin that previously was there, salvaged materials from it, and reused the foundation. "What I do is contribute in small ways to the surrounding environment," Heaton says. "They're small contributions because I'm a small firm, but isn't that a more sustainable way to go anyway?"



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