

Story by  
KAREN BJORNLAND

Photographs by  
RANDALL PERRY

house & garden

# GREEN LIVING

## SARATOGA SPRINGS FAMILY LOVES THEIR ENERGY EFFICIENT HOME

**W**hen Katie Capelli was a girl, she always lived in an old house. And she grew up in Round Lake and Saratoga Springs, places where homes are revered for their history and architecture. When Capelli and her husband Richard Frank decided to build a new house on the East Side of Saratoga Springs, they knew exactly what they wanted.

The eco-friendly home has a modern but rustic farmhouse feel.



Photo courtesy of Phinney Design Group

Clockwise from top: A Michael Phinney-designed, McCormick Carpentry-built green home on Cottage Street in Saratoga Springs; the kitchen has farmhouse charm with its wood floors, butcher block island counter and stone fireplace; off the kitchen is a pumpkin-colored sunroom used by the family year-round; in the master bedroom, a graceful privacy screen was built from salvaged windows; colorful tiles decorate the entry hall.





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“We didn’t want it to feel new,” says Capelli. “We were trying to build something that looks old. Our goal was to have it look like a renovated space.”

“We were looking for something casual, rustic and not so ornate,” adds Frank. They hired architect Michael Phinney of Phinney Design Group and came up with a residence that Phinney describes as “modern cottage with agrarian influences.” Built by McCormick Carpentry, the three-story house on Cottage Street is golden-mustard in

color and suits its White Street neighborhood, which is known for carriage houses and barns. In the horse-and-buggy days, those buildings served the mansions along Union Avenue.

New construction offered the opportunity for “green design,” making the home as energy-efficient and environmentally friendly as possible. For the couple, who own Four Seasons Natural Foods, it was a “common sense” decision, Frank says. “We liked the green aspect. It’s thinking about your surroundings.”

The U.S. Green Building Council lists their home as LEED-certified, a label that stands for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, and its rating is “platinum,” the highest of four levels. “It’s one of the highest-rated, LEED-certified buildings in the Capital District,” says Phinney.

When rating a house, “green” features may include: access to transportation and the community; durability and longevity; access to natural light; renewable energy such as solar panels; efficient appliances; locally sourced and recycled materials; how the home is insulated; and water use for landscaping.

Capelli and Frank live in their 4,212 square-foot “green home” with their children, 10-year-old Quinn and five-year-old Molly. During a recent tour, sunlight spilled into the first floor from an expanse of multi-pane, floor-to-ceiling windows. The center windows swing open, like French doors, bringing the scents and sounds of nature inside. Off the kitchen and entrance hall, there’s a pumpkin-colored sunroom where the family shares many of its meals.

“We use this room all year,” Capelli says.

The kitchen, with its wood floors and an island topped with a butcher block, has a farmhouse charm and simplicity. “The kitchen is in the center of the house, so I can hear and see what’s going on,” says Capelli. “It looks like a big house, but when we’re in it, it doesn’t feel like a big house.” From the kitchen, Capelli can glance into a home office, a playroom and the living room.

Throughout the house, decorative accents give the impression that this could be an old house. An antique leaded-glass insert appears over a doorway, a rough beam crosses a ceiling. There are old-style pocket doors and barn-like sliding doors.

In the living room, Capelli lays her hand on the grey stone wall of the masonry heater fireplace. “It’s still warm, the stone radiates heat,” she says. The fireplace, which has a firebox that opens into the kitchen, is a centerpiece the couple hopes to create. Made of South Bay quartzite from the Champlain Valley, the stone was hand-chiseled and fitted without mortar. On the wall of the fireplace, the stone has a wavy texture, like an abstract sculpture.

“It’s called ripple. It’s from an old sea bed,” Frank explains.

Walking up to the second floor, Phinney says the central staircase is one of the house’s LEED features. The open vertical space, which stretches upward from the



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lower floors to the cupola in the attic, and a system of fans that push air up and down, create a “thermal chimney,” he says. “All the rooms open onto it, and it lets heat rise, collect and escape from the house during the summer. It provides natural ventilation and cooling for the house.”

On the second floor, old-fashioned patchwork quilts in soft colors cover the beds in the master bedroom and the children’s rooms. More glass accents add warmth and the illusion of age. In the master bedroom, windows salvaged from an old building are transformed into a graceful privacy screen. In the master bathroom, a stained-glass panel hangs over a claw-foot bathtub. A cabinet in the children’s bathroom was custom-made by Tico Vogt, a woodworker who lives in Northumberland.

In keeping with the agrarian theme, Capelli and Frank ruled out recessed lighting.

Instead, they selected one-of-a-kind fixtures made by artisans. A ceiling sculpture that looks like a tangle of vines illuminates the master bedroom, and in other rooms, ceiling lights sport hand-painted silk shades. On the third level, a large open room with red birch floors is Capelli’s studio space. Capelli, a graduate of Skidmore College, is a Nia movement instructor who teaches at Bloom in Saratoga Springs.

With its platinum rating, the home is green-minded from top to bottom. The roof is topped with solar panels. Outdoors, there are native plantings by C & D McBurnie Landscaping and a cistern that collects rainwater.

Before they built their new home, the couple lived in the same neighborhood in an old house half this size. “But this is cheaper to heat,” Capelli says.

Molly says “the warm fireplace” is her favorite part of the house. “I like the beams and the stairs,” says Quinn.

Their mom hopes that someday the mustard-colored cottage will become another family’s old house. “We are building this so it’s here in 200 years,” says Capelli. **SL**

*Karen Bjornland is an award-winning feature writer at The Daily Gazette. She lives in Greenfield Center.*

*For 27 years Randall Perry Photography has been producing award-winning architectural photography for clients in the design, construction and hospitality industries through offices in the Capital Region, Cape Cod, and Naples, Fla.*



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### *Food for thought.*

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*What’s for dinner?*



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