

VERMONT

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Building the Bluegrass Barn

STORY BY **BENJAMIN LERNER**

PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY **ANNIE & SAM BARTLETT**



Accomplished musician, Annie Bartlett, and skilled architect,
Andrew Volansky, share the fascinating story behind the Bluegrass Barn in Stowe



Building the Bluegrass Barn

On a peaceful hillside in Stowe, a gorgeous barn-style structure stands next to a tall maple tree with a gently-swaying tire swing. Its back porch is topped by a lofty, vaulted roof, which casts shadows down onto a fieldstone patio. A spacious clearing in the backyard with a fire pit and pond is bisected by a Nordic skiing and mountain biking trail, which connects to one of Stowe's larger trail networks. Built on the site of an old farmhouse and cottage, the enchanting structure seamlessly blends classic Vermont style with modern architectural sensibilities. The versatile property hosts both small musical retreats and larger gatherings, which are facilitated by its community-minded owners, Annie, and Sam Bartlett.

Originally, Annie Bartlett came across the property while skiing down the same trail that runs through the barn's backyard. At the time, the structures that occupied the space where the barn now stands were entirely different. Nevertheless, Bartlett recalls that the grounds still possessed an undeniably charming quality. "I came around the corner in the winter and I saw the Worcester range lit up by the sunset. It was amazing." When the property became available, the Bartletts leapt at the opportunity to acquire it and preserve it. "Our friends in Stowe were looking for gathering and community spaces. Particularly, there was a need for spaces that could take advantage of Stowe's incredible natural beauty."

Throughout the year-long rebuilding campaign that spanned from 2020 to 2021, the Bartletts worked closely with the gifted Stowe-based architect, Andrew Volansky, to actualize their vision. As a result of Volansky's meticulous and thoughtful design work, the barn was reborn as a welcoming creative oasis. Throughout the rebuilding process, Volansky collaborated with talented, hardworking, locally-based Vermont contractors and craftspeople, such as Alec Genung Construction, Inc., Sterling Staircase, Ambler Design, Custom Metal Fabricators LLC, and IronArt Custom Metalworks, among others.

Volansky's overarching architectural philosophy of "Vermont Mountain

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Modern” aligned perfectly with the Bartletts’ vision for a gorgeous, mountainside sanctuary – and the results are truly extraordinary. “The ‘Vermont Mountain Modern’ designs that my architectural firm produces make efficient use of spaces while taking advantage of natural, locally-sourced materials,” notes Volansky. Volansky’s designs incorporate sustainable features whenever possible. “I also like to connect outdoor and indoor spaces,” he adds. “Vermont is a beautiful place, regardless of whether it is July or

February. We want to bring people closer to their surrounding environments while embracing the full potential of the spaces that we work with.”

Today, the Bartletts’ family, friends, and musical collaborators make frequent use of the aptly-named “Bluegrass Barn” and its welcoming outdoor grounds. In the summertime, the meadow behind the barn comes alive during their spirited musical performances. Celebrated roots, bluegrass, and Americana musicians travel

great distances to visit the Bluegrass Barn, and they are welcomed by the Bartletts with open arms.

As a classically-trained, virtuosic violist, violinist, and fiddle player, Annie Bartlett honed her skills at esteemed academic institutions such as Walnut Hill School for the Arts, New England Conservatory Prep School, and Yale University. Bartlett has applied her versatile musical skillset towards participating in a wide range of musical projects. Prime examples include

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the roots music trio Hank Wonder, who have performed at the Bluegrass Barn, and the bold, Boston-based classical-fusion quartet, Rosin. "I have many friends who are touring and professional musicians who live in urban areas," shares Annie Bartlett. "When the pandemic hit, it became apparent that there was a lack of accessible, rural spaces where musicians could reconnect with nature."

Taking that in mind, the Bartletts worked hand in hand with Volansky to create a structure that seamlessly connected the outdoor performance and gathering space with an inviting interior living space in the barn. The porch is connected to the indoor area by a unique, architecturally-innovative foldable door system. "It stacks like an accordion in the warmer months, creating a 12-foot-wide opening, and effectively more than doubling the usable space in the warm months," says Volansky.

"There are also retractable screens on the porch that can drop down to create a screened-in space. It's very adaptable."

The interior areas of the barn are outfitted with attractive custom furnishings, which make efficient use of its flexible and aesthetic spaces. Notable examples include a pull-down Murphy bed, which fits perfectly over the custom-designed red oak coffee table and couch in the main "Studio" room on the downstairs floor. "This was done because its compact footprint did not allow for moving furniture out of the way of the Murphy bed," notes Volansky. The sleeping area in the studio is complemented by a well-appointed bathroom, as well as a smartly-designed kitchen with zinc countertops and a space-efficient induction cooktop. Down the hallway from the Studio room, a ladder leads to an additional loft area upstairs. It is furnished

with red oak beds, which are located in a comfortable guest room. The guestroom stands adjacent to a sturdy and strong cargo net, which hangs over the downstairs studio area. "The cargo net is a fun place where the children of visiting friends and artists can play," says Volansky. "There's something for everyone to enjoy." At the front of the barn, a separate garage structure houses the Bartletts' bike and ski gear. It is also equipped with a Tesla Powerwall, which stores the energy harnessed by the solar panels on the barn's roof. "We estimate that the barn is completely self-sufficient from a heating and cooling perspective," says Volansky. "We haven't had it formally When the travel restrictions opened up in 2021, the Bartletts began holding concerts for their friends and local community members, which continued during the 2022 summer season. "It's been great to see people enjoying the space and the



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music," says Bartlett. "We're certainly going to do it again this summer." While the Bartletts have not hosted concerts at the Bluegrass Barn in the winter, they have hosted several groups of musicians who performed at the nearby Zenbarn in Waterbury during the colder months. "We've made it an available resource for musicians who are traveling through and playing locally," adds Bartlett.

As the Bluegrass Barn continues to evolve, Volansky has maintained his collaborative partnership with the Bartletts, and he continues to work with them to further improve the barn's amenities. "We're going to install an outdoor shower so that people can rinse off after swimming in the pond and long summer days," he says.

"There's a lot of potential that we still have yet to explore." Volansky is a longtime resident of Stowe with deep Vermont roots, and he has also attended several concerts at the Bluegrass Barn. "I'm excited for the performances this summer," says Volansky. "We're going to hold a small fundraiser for the Stowe Trails Partnership, who maintain the beautiful trails that Stowe is so well-known for. I happen to be a member, and I think it's a great way to give back to the community. The Bartletts are very generous and kind people, and the Bluegrass Barn is a beautiful symbol of their love for Stowe. I'm grateful to have worked on the project with them, and I'm excited to see where they take it from here."