

Transforming lives with architecture

A Great Barrington architect/designer team, Bruce Moore and Michael Alper of Red House Design, have begun two new projects locally in Malden Bridge and Chatham. Although experts in new construction design and restoration, it is in renovation, seen here in before and the after photos, where the duo's expertise truly startles – in a positive way.

The partners say that houses from the mid-fifties, the so-called ranch houses of the period, such as the one below (1955), were solidly built. This house, with build out in the front, helped create the well-designed house in the larger picture at right.



The original window-wall-window placement of the house, left, was opened with a wall of fenestration, above, bringing healthy light into the room. Special hinge trusses allowed the former, claustrophobic 7'6" height of the room to be amplified into the open plan seen in the upper picture.



Bruce Moore, left, and Michael Alper

By Rich Kraham

It only takes a short step through the door of Bruce Moore and Michael Alper's house and design office in Great Barrington, Massachusetts to understand the ability of this design duo to create something transformative and special to inhabit. Their own house is a study in the great contribution of design in creating something accessible and sustainable that doesn't scream "designed," but rather "something easy to live in" said Moore.

"We want to create homes that are sensible, sustainable and provide 'healthy air,' the kind of houses that also reflect our clients' lifestyles."

Red House Design is a multi-disciplinary design and architecture firm whose current work includes custom-designed homes and commercial buildings, residential interiors, renovations, restorations and additions to existing properties with an emphasis on sustainable and energy efficient building materials and methodologies.

According to internet sources, the designers' "untouched 1955 ranch house underwent a complete transformation including the expansion of 400 square feet of living space and addition of an 800 square foot garage. The project included all new high efficiency windows/doors, Energy Star® roof, tankless water heater, partial radiant floor heating and closed cell foam insulation. A new contemporary façade incorporates passive solar shading, heating and daylighting blended with natural cedar shingles, trellis & lattice."

Up country designers

Co-founders Moore and Alper, who both had corporate careers in New York City before looking for a different lifestyle up-country, "have collaborated on design for renovations

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A screened and covered deck with bubble skylights became a more comfortable spot than the previous iteration, below.



and new construction since 1993, focusing on a variety of residential scale projects. Bruce, a registered architect in Massachusetts, New York and Connecticut with more than twenty years experience in corporate, commercial, mixed use and residential architecture and interiors, has traditionally led the business and technical sides of the projects, while Michael, who has more than twenty years of experience as an interior and retail designer, has focused on the visual aspects of the project work,” according to previously published sources.

Working locally

Sites inspire the duo’s designs. “Columbia County and Berkshire County are different landscapes,” said Moore. “And this diversity informs our work. In Columbia County where we’re working now there is more rolling meadows and hills, the best of both. It is very bucolic. Here in the Berkshires there are more woods and mountains, verticality. One of our sites near Chatham is mixed wetlands and forest and Catskill views.

When talking about sustainability, Alper said that there “might not be an immediate return on investment because many of the new initiatives such as geothermal and solar are long term commitments.” The duo emphasizes that the best projects address infrastructure issues first – drainage, electrical, insulation – versus the aesthetics.

“It’s not sexy to pay money when you can’t see what’s been done, but the best projects and the longer life of a home result when these issues are addressed, especially in renovation,” said Alper.

“When we start a renovation, the first things we look at are the attic and the basement to see where the skeletons[infrastructure issues] are hidden,” echoed Moore.

New systems. collaborative process

Moore and Alper stress that new sustainable systems have technical advantages, but overall improve lives and are gentle on the environment.

“Low-E glass, high resistance building insulation, architectural shading devices, daylight capture, and the responsible use of seasonal landscape contribute to a highly efficient building envelope. Nontraditional systems for domestic hot water, gray water re-use, interior heating and cooling, along with high efficiency appliances and low draw fixtures reduce energy and resource consumption.”



The extension of the front, roadside window wall, and rear wall, helped create more storage space (doors on right) and a chance to create a more contemporary hearth.

The design duo collaborate closely with clients to make smart design and construction decisions and to discuss preliminary budgets. They charge a percentage of a targeted construction budget that allows them to design to that budget and not deliver something that is not achievable. The process with clients sifts the desires and needs to come up with a plan that fits budgets, but retains aesthetic elements that please both client and designers.

Moore and Alper’s work also encompasses strategic land planning, site evaluation, landscape and site design, and code and zoning analysis.

Whether new design, renovation, restoration, or site planning, “we aim to transform lives with design,” said Moore. “After all,” said Alper, “this is ultimately about our clients and their lives.”