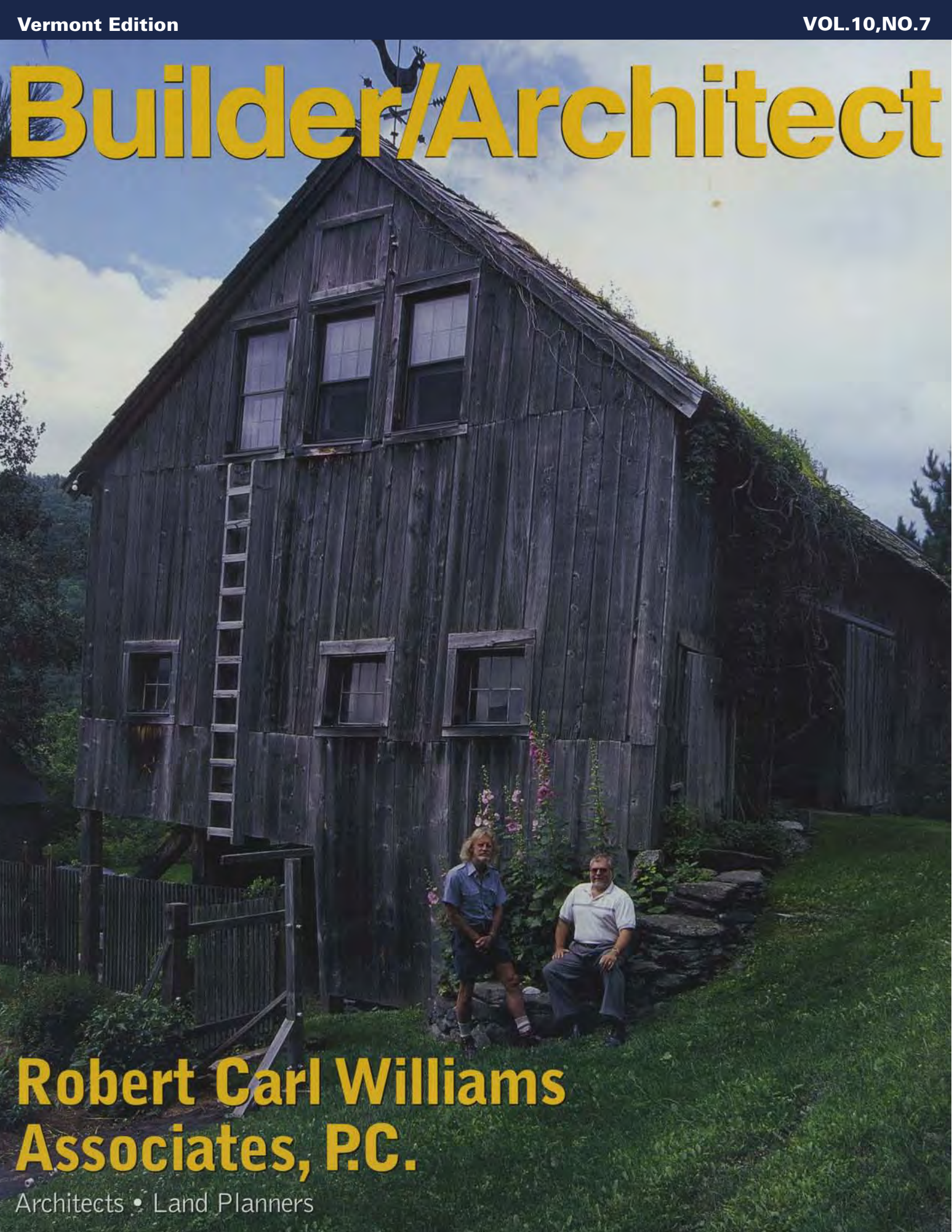


# Builder/Architect



**Robert Carl Williams  
Associates, P.C.**

Architects • Land Planners



The roots of Robert Carl Williams Associates trace back to the 1960s and the founding and development of Hawk Mountain in the hills of central Vermont. They have designed upwards of 500 mountainside homes throughout the resort and for many years, and through 1990 they were the exclusive designer for Hawk Mountain. This home, a Danby model, has been repeated in various sizes, some with walk-out basements, and some with terracing, to take advantage of the sloping, natural setting. On this home's main level are a kitchen, dining room, living room, bunk room and guest bedroom and bath. On the upper level, a master bedroom and bath and added guest room. Andersen windows from Bethel Mills.

# Robert Carl Williams Associates, P.C.

## Architects Land Planners

by Stephanie Nelson

Since Robert Carl Williams arrived in Vermont from his native East Tennessee more than four decades ago, his firm has helped enrich and define the complexion of his adopted home state.

Starting in 1962, when the first two Williams-designed mountain-side homes went on sale at Hawk Mountain in Pittsfield, Robert Carl Williams Associates, P.C. has gone on to design the better part of a thousand buildings of all description, primarily in Vermont, but also across the country and around the world.

At the same time, the firm has stayed true to its original mission, operating even now from a secluded farmhouse on Upper Michigan Road in Pittsfield, which also serves as home for Robert Williams.

“From the outset, I wanted to make my life and my work one

thing,” states Williams. “Working out of my home is a very natural extension. I’ve done it since 1960.”

Creating functional and comfortable home environments has been the primary goal of Williams, his current partner and company president Daniel Pratt, and their staff, from the start. In his company’s statement of purpose, Williams defines the home as a place that “deeply influences the quality of personal life, a precious possession where we spend most of our lives.”

Over the years, the company has grown to handle any design challenge, including historical, commercial, recreational or institutional, including small projects of limited budget. Among their high profile commercial projects are the rebuilt and expanded Shops at the Shack

**In this central Vermont Adirondack style home, Robert Carl Williams Associates used recessed dormers on the upper level to create a unique appearance. The home looks out on expansive views, including autumn foliage. General contractors were Garth Quillia and Peter Klein of Klein Construction.**



PHOTO BY DANIEL PRATT



**A view from the same home's interior reveals some of those interesting angles created by the varied roofline and use of negative dormers. The central open space, with day bed, opens into several upper level rooms with distant views.**

(formerly The Ski Shack) at the corner of Route 4 and the Killington access road; the Killington Skyship base station and pedestrian bridge across Route 4; Killington's new post office; and the remodeled and updated Snowshed Base Lodge. All were completed in the 1990s, along

**"The eloquent use of form, light and space with color and texture creates an architecture that welcomes, delights and even inspires.**

**In a world where much is beyond our control, it is possible to improve the quality of life by enhancing our surroundings. Beautifully designed, appropriate spaces can make a significant contribution to the richness of everyday life.**

**Elevating the human spirit by enriching and caring for our environment is a worthy objective."**

**- Robert Carl Williams**

with a new headquarters for worldwide book publisher Inner Traditions in Rochester, the expanded Wilcox Pharmacy in Rutland, and a totally rebuilt and improved building for Advance Animations in Stockbridge. Much of their Vermont work is along the "Route 100 corridor," stretching from Mt. Snow to Jay Peak.

Despite the growing variety of work at Robert Carl Williams Associates, homes are still their focus and their passion.

"Seventy-five percent of our work today remains residential," says Pratt. "The other 25 percent is divided between new commercial, which in Vermont is mostly geared toward the ski areas or professional offices, or renovation work on old structures, some of them historic."

Now nearing a quarter century with Williams – the last 10 years in partnership – Pratt recalls with clarity the day in 1980 when he was hired.

"I had recognized Robert's talents and had first applied to work for him in the early 1970s at Hawk Mountain," says Pratt. "Robert sent me a nice letter, but I wasn't hired. So I went to work as a draftsman for another firm, and then joined a company that designed tramways and funiculars. While at that firm, I worked on the tramway at Cannon Mountain. They wanted me to do some work outside the United States, but I wanted to stay in the area and it happened at that time that Robert was looking for

someone to head up the design department at Hawk Mountain. I interviewed and this time was hired. I met with Robert, looked him in the eye and said, ‘If you hire me, I will not disappoint you.’”

Clearly, Williams had not been disappointed. “Daniel’s a great designer, a good person and a good friend,” says Williams, leaning back in a chair in his home’s library, dressed casually in a blue work shirt, shorts and hiking boots. “You need all of those qualities to make a partnership work. Now Dan’s the president, and I’m the senior partner, since I am now taking four months off in the winters. He’s an owner along with me. He’s the chief executive officer. This provides continuity the company needs in my absence.”

Now in his 70s, Williams devotes the winters to traveling the world, spending much of that leisure time on his sailboat, which this past summer took him to the South Pacific and the island nation of Vanuatu.



PHOTO BY RANDALL PERRY PHOTOGRAPHY

**Right: This rural New England style home was designed by Robert Carl Williams Associates to take advantage of mountain views to the east and southeast. The rear view shows the home’s library (upper level) and great room, which opens onto a large in-ground pool. Extensive interior and exterior stonework provide eye-catching accents. General contractor was Tony Ciufo, Inc.**

**Below: Robert Carl Williams Associates oversaw the total restoration of this unique, shingled New England style home, located a half hour north of Boston and situated on several acres of meadow, surrounded by islands of trees, stone walls and hedgerows. Taking the original one-level home, Williams and Daniel Pratt developed a two-story design, while also adding single-story additions to the side.**



PHOTO BY PETER VANDERWALKER



**Designed to resemble an expanded Vermont farmhouse, this home sports three brick fireplaces with polished stone surrounds, upper level dormered bedrooms and an open stairwell from the lower to upper level. The porch at left is ideal for al fresco dining, or for merely relaxing and taking in luxurious views of the Green Mountains over a vast lawn. While the hum of highway traffic is slightly audible nearby, the site is tucked into an idyllic secluded setting. General contractor was Dan Gram.**

**Daniel Pratt's home, a renovated farmhouse in West Rutland. In the early 1990s he designed and oversaw a total remodel, plus 900-square-foot addition, with elements of circa-1900 "craft homes". Says Pratt, "Having just completed a contemporary mountain home, my wife Jayne and I decided to take on the challenge of an old farmhouse with fantastic views overlooking two states. Though we loved our mountain home, this farmhouse made us feel more at home from Day One. We worked together with local tradesmen to complete the project. I have a genuine respect for the talented craftsman or woman who understands the heart and soul of creative work."**



But when he returns to his home state and the bucolic milieu of Upper Michigan Road, he pitches right in at the design table, along with Pratt, key man architect Steve Fenn and the full staff of drafts people.

"I take it right off the top of the deck as it comes in," says Williams, "from a garage addition to a large home. All my ego requirements have been satisfied. I consider myself to be like a country doctor. I just fix what hurts.

I plan to continue my life's work as long as I can contribute. There's a great deal that's fulfilling in a profession dedicated to enhancing our living environment. And what is more important than our home?"

Pratt shares the same dedication to his craft that still drives Williams.

"I love creating spaces for people to enjoy their work, their recreation, their everyday living," he says, "spaces where they can find comfort in this sometimes irrational world."

Pratt still does all his initial designs by hand, producing an example from a stack of drawings in his spacious office/work room/conference room. Large windows look out on a wooded hillside, where rabbits, fox, deer, even an occasional moose, might wander past. As he talks, he colors in the approximately 18-by-24-inch piece of paper – the building's exterior elevations, now filled in with green and brown tones, the interior layout in yellow and orange, with main entrances indicated by a red dot.

"This size drawing is manageable for people. You can sit at a table with clients and not have them feel overwhelmed. I will not initially show a computer-generated plan to a client. It takes the spirit out of it. My drawings show my feelings about the project. Once that's done and

approved, we generate on the computer precise, accurate construction documents for the whole project, from the concrete forms to the knobs on the cabinetry, and everything in between. That includes the mechanical systems, the lighting systems, the landscaping . . . in some cases right down to the dishes, and salt and pepper shakers.

“I focus on the big picture and work with our staff to keep up with new products. There are great new products in areas like plumbing and lighting.”

Pratt always has several designs incubating, often popping out of bed at his West Rutland farmhouse when an idea strikes in the wee hours, or heading into work at 5 a.m. when he can't sleep and wants to hit the drawing board.

“There are actually eight projects I'm in the beginning stages of right now. They range from a three-room addition to large homes. All of them happen to be hillside sites, which is good, because that's one of our specialties. You can utilize walk-outs. They can be great recreational spaces, sleeping spaces, wine cellars, great retreats for children.”

Pratt relishes the entire design process, which begins long before he even takes pencil in hand.

“First, I'll spend a couple of days on the site – whether it's in Vermont or across the country – getting to know the sights, the sounds, the air movement, what's happening in that neighborhood. I gather data, meet with the client. Then, after all that, I create a concept in the form of a two-dimensional sketch, to scale, and a floor plan. Then I color them up, like this.” He pushes the now fully colored floor plan across the table.



Robert Carl Williams has abided by certain guiding principles since he first came to Vermont in 1960, having served in the Air Force during the Korean War then migrating north to Harvard, where he attended their Graduate School of Design.

“From the Boston area, I discovered the magic of Vermont,” he says. “I started skiing there while at Harvard, and it seemed to have what I wanted . . . the natural beauty, proximity to ski areas, and above all, an opportunity to express new ideas before the burden of regulations.”

Robert and a financial partner in the early 1960s bought for \$26,500 a 165-acre parcel in Pittsfield that soon became the Hawk Mountain colony. Williams eventually purchased additional hillside land and expanded Hawk Mountain to five separate full-service communities – in Pittsfield, Rochester, Stockbridge, Plymouth and Killington.

“We took the land most developers would have considered unbuildable and converted it into mountainside communities, which provided exciting views and saved the valleys for farms.

We were conserving land before Act 250 was passed, preserving the land, master planning, using common spaces, greenbelts.” In 1980, Williams left Hawk Mountain, while still remaining the designated design firm for the five mountain communities. That changed in 1990 when the



**One of three “curved greenhouses” in this contemporary central Vermont home, centered around a complementary round dining room table. The lighting element creates a central coziness in an otherwise very open room. Glass provided by Countryside Glass. Vice president of construction for Hawk Mountain Corp. was Peter DeCota.**

new owners overextended themselves and went bankrupt. Since then, Robert Carl Williams Associates has continued to plan homes at Hawk Mountain, though not as exclusive designer. Overall, the firm designed approximately 500 homes in the five communities from those initial two homes, priced at a modest \$15,500 to more recent, often grandiose vacation retreats, in the half-million-and-up range.

In 1997, in a 35th anniversary edition of the company newsletter, *Architectural Details*, Williams mused: “Perhaps the most important and abiding principle in what we consider the stewardship of Vermont mountain land is the placement of our homes within their natural settings.

“It was the underlying intent of the whole venture to create homes of lasting quality which would elevate the lives and spirits of their owners, even alter their lives for the better, a worthy objective I still believe in today.”

**“Often in our stair designs,” says Daniel Pratt, “we work with two different rail conditions on either side of the stair. In this case, stone on one side, suggesting a dry waterfall. On the other, a sculpted, sheet rocked wall. The curved stairway offers a central, dramatic focus.” The curved stone wall railing also contains a recessed fireplace, recessed wood storage area and a recessed television alcove.**





**Above:** This renovated New England farmhouse, with additions, is tucked into the hills with gorgeous views of the Green Mountains. The owner, who served as general contractor, commissioned Robert Carl Williams Associates to redesign the entire structure “from the inside out”. The original building was stripped to the frame, leveled out and rebuilt, highlighting interior beams. Care was taken to preserve existing trees. Stone walls were also saved and rebuilt.

**Left:** This indoor pool is a Robert Carl Williams Associates-designed addition to a mountain home – one of many pools they have designed over the years. The room includes numerous environmental controls to maintain proper humidity levels, as well as special finishes on the walls. General contractor was Michael Karpovich.



Though he may spend part of the year wandering the globe, the Green Mountains remain a lodestone. Not only to stay fresh by practicing his profession, but out of his continuing devotion to Vermont.

“In today’s modern civilization, with all its problems, Vermont’s doing pretty well,” he smiles. “The highways aren’t littered with advertisements. The variety of seasons is a great stimulus, along with an independent thinking population. We’re the only state with a Congressional delegation that has guts. All in all, we’re going down slower than the rest.

“Vermont is a very special place in the world. It’s home.”

*Congratulations to Robert Carl Williams Associates, P.C. on its selection as Architect of the Month. You may reach them at Box 949, Upper Michigan Road, Pittsfield, VT 05762. Or contact them at (802) 746.8917, via e-mail at [rcwartects@aol.com](mailto:rcwartects@aol.com) or visit the Web site at [www.rcwa.com](http://www.rcwa.com)*