

Architectural Details ♦

Robert Carl Williams Associates P.C. Pittsfield, Vermont
Principals: Daniel J. Pratt, A.I.A., president
Robert Carl Williams, founder

Autumn • Winter 1999



This mountain home with plenty of open space living was designed by Daniel J. Pratt, AIA, president of Robert Carl Williams Associates. It replaced an undersized, outdated cottage that was moved to another location and is now being used as a cozy hunting camp.

Open Spaces of the Home

by Robert Carl Williams

In the early days of our country, especially in the northern climates, the functions and activities of family life tended to take place around the Great fireplace which functioned both for cooking as well as heating the space and lives of our forefathers. This was the “family kitchen” as we came to identify it later. One can imagine the children playing close by, the women attending to the functions of the home and the men joining the family activities after the outside chores were accomplished at the end of day.

The “family kitchen” became a symbol of early family unity when living from the land challenged the muscle, mind and hearts of our forefathers, hardship often unifying both small and large groups of human beings. Although this is not intended to be a social commentary, architecture often follows the habits and inclinations of its society.



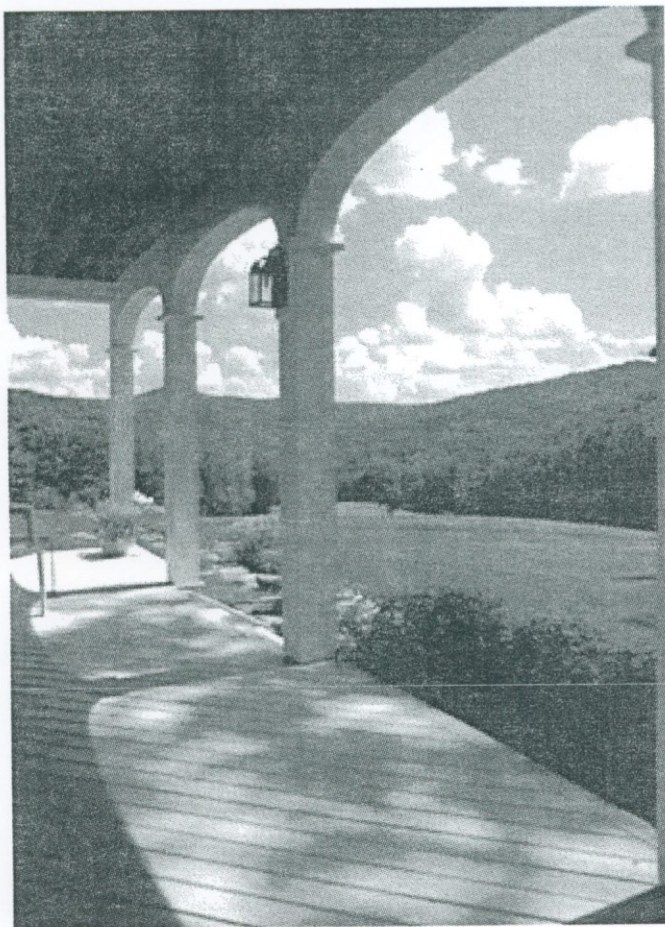
cont'd on p. 2 Open spaces can take on a very organic form.

Open Living Spaces, *cont'd*

As our country gradually made its transition from primitive life to rural farms, to urban and suburban living, we have seen architecture track this evolution.

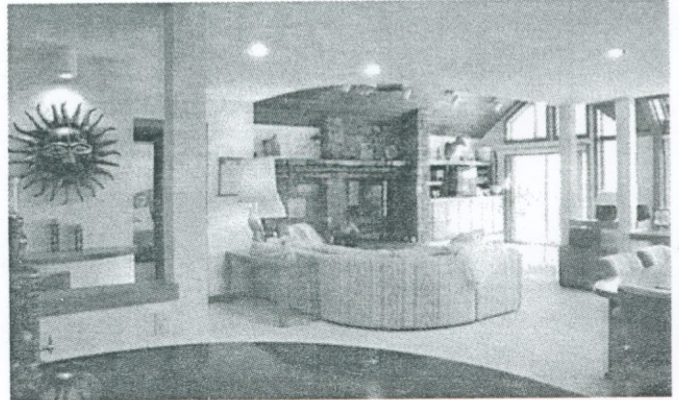
During the early and middle parts of the twentieth century the interior spaces of the home drew away from the unified space of family activity toward separate identities of function i.e., the kitchen became the food preparation area, held separate from the dining area, as was the living room or parlor which tended toward more formal activities of social life within the family. For the more opulent families we might see the addition of music rooms, libraries and such. The "family rooms" came later as we moved back toward the present.

Interestingly enough, the bedroom through the development of habitat within our society remained as a discreet space within the home for sleeping and dressing as well as for private



Open living extends to the outside.

personal activities such as study, reading and the like. In our experience now, we see a leaning in family life back toward the unified space albeit for quite different reasons than those in earlier periods of our country. Today finds most of the adults in the home working outside the home and returning in evenings for family social activities and perhaps even preparing the evening meal together. Couple this present day situation

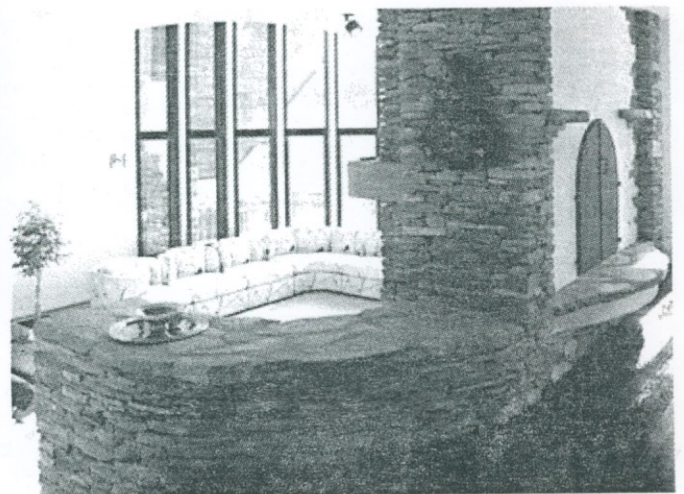


A view into the living room over the kitchen counter.

with the entertaining of friends and guests, we see almost without fail the gathering of friends and family happening in the kitchen whether it will support the crowd or not. In brief, all of us want to be where the action is, and in turn the ones preparing the food simply don't want to be isolated from the gathering.

So here we are again at the full turn of the wheel, back to the original condition of family life in a unified space, though with modern technology supporting expanses of glass, conditioned climate and spatially exciting environments. No small part of this open space in the modern home is the greatly improved aesthetics of not only the kitchen appliances but the aesthetics of food preparation itself. One might look at all this as a sort of performing arts of family life.

The contemporary open space, however, is far from simple, in that the way it moves and separates the activities becomes a very important architectural challenge while leaving open the visual excitement of activities happening in other parts of the open space. In summary, without seeming simplistic, we are seeing a demand for open spaces with the preparation of food being the main event. In my observation most of the important conversation (if it happens at all) happens either around the preparation or the breaking of bread together.



In this home, the dining room flows into the living room around the stone/stucco fireplace.

photos by Randall Perry