

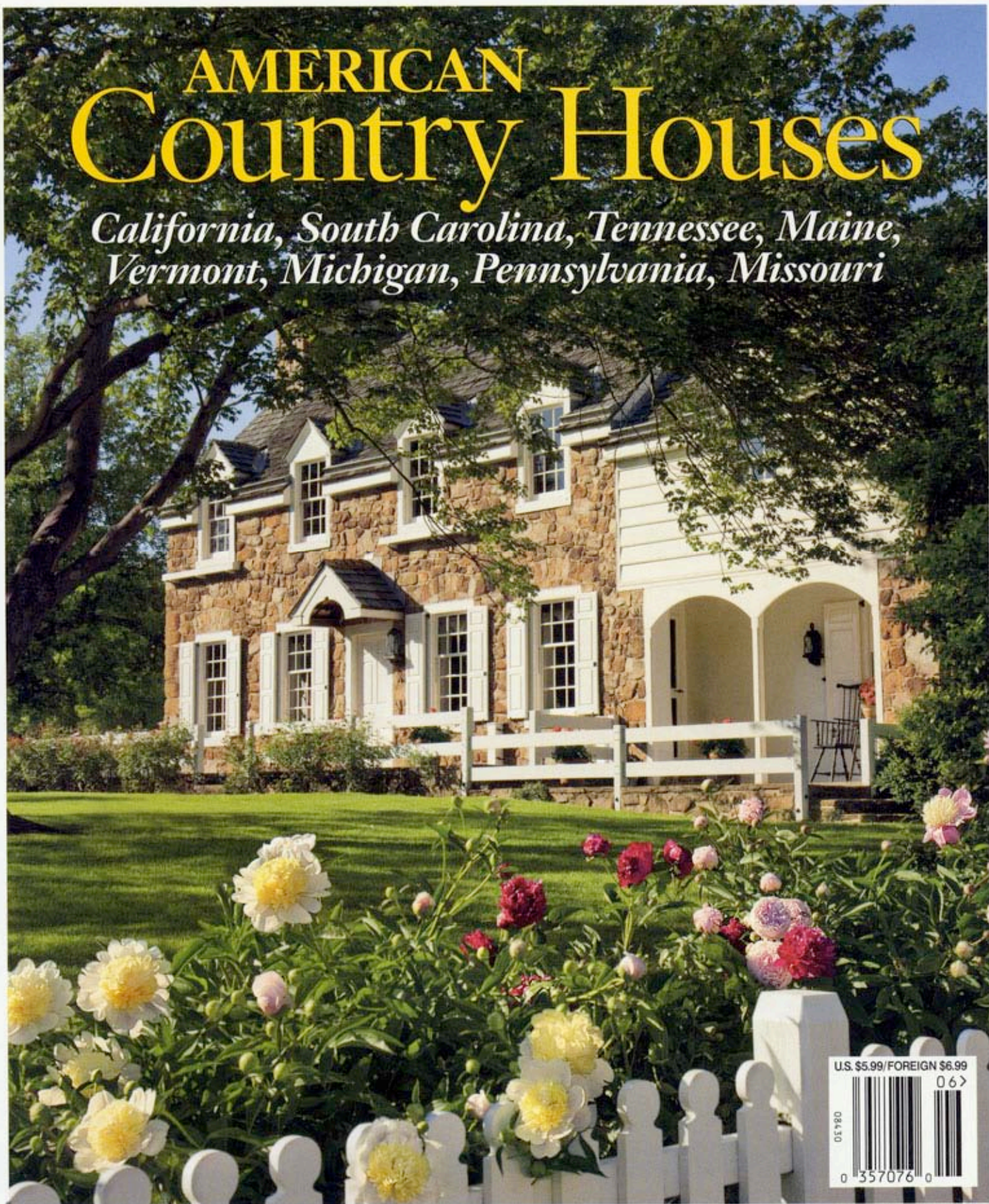
# ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

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## AMERICAN Country Houses

*California, South Carolina, Tennessee, Maine,  
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"The initial concept was to create a new sequence for entering the property and to unify the buildings with the landscape and each other," architect John "Bud" Wilson says of a family retreat he designed in Stowe, Vermont. The multiple terrace levels "provide varied settings for viewing the artwork." He renovated the main house, right, and built a guesthouse, left.



*Vermont*  
**Eye on Americana**

A MODERN RETREAT IN STOWE CREATES A STRIKING  
BACKDROP FOR A COLLECTION OF FOLK ART

Architecture by Wilson Architects/Landscape Architecture by H. Keith Wagner Partnership  
Text by Wendy Moonan/Photography by Brian Vanden Brink



In 2001, when a Palm Beach business executive bought a decrepit summer house for his family in Stowe, Vermont, he told his wife he wanted to make a deal. “I was going to fix the outside, and she was going to do the inside,” he recalls.

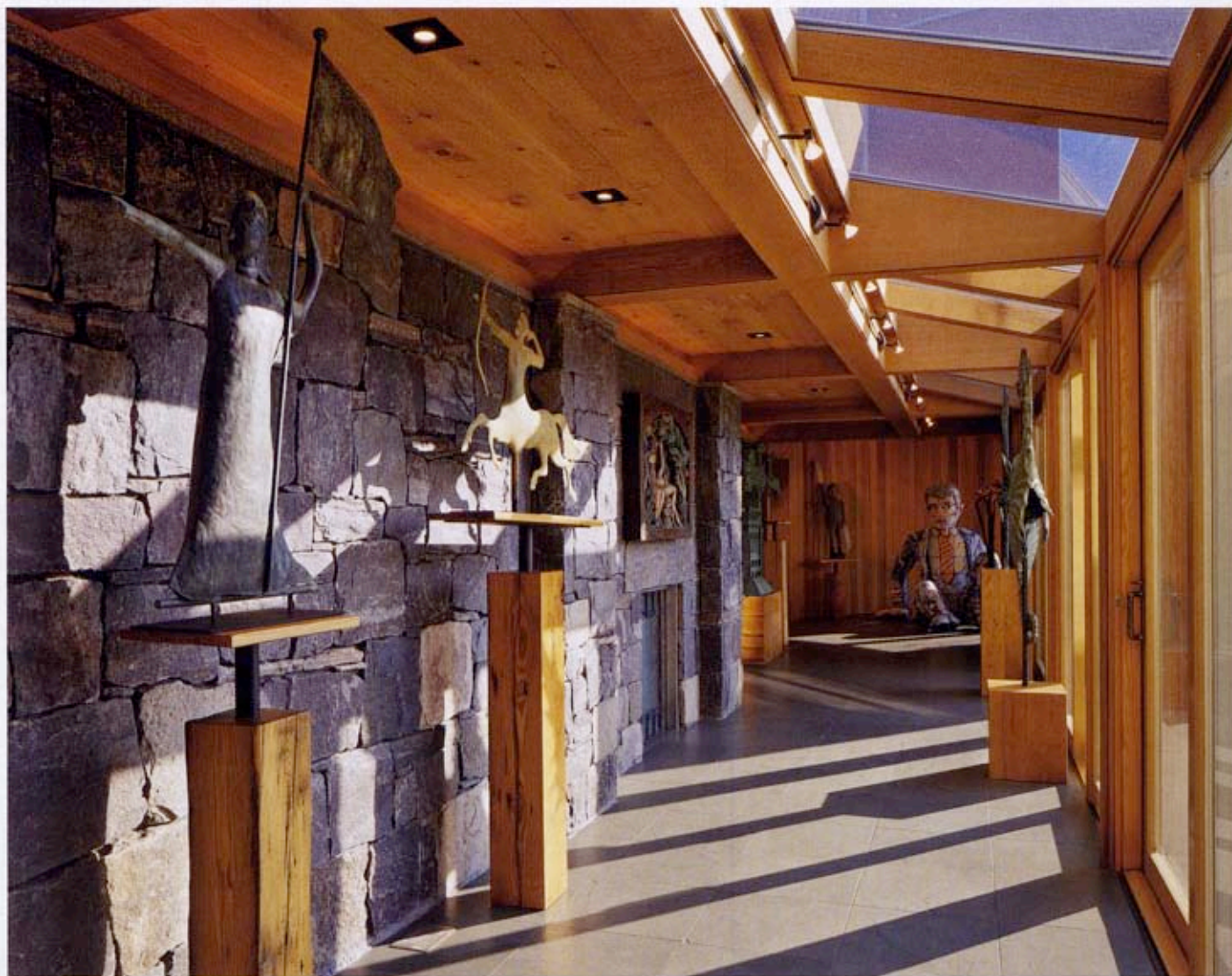
That “deal” soon turned into an entirely different enterprise: The couple decided that the house, in keeping with New England, should be a showcase for American folk sculpture. They immediately began buying weathervanes, whirligigs, cigar-store Indians and carousel figures.

“We found we liked three-dimensional pieces, not furniture or paintings,” he explains. “At first we went to every show and fair—and we made some

mistakes. It took a couple of years. Then we culled our collection and focused on the top dealers.”

In eight years they have put together a collection that is little known but that experts say is among the best in the country. “Both of them have a great eye,” says dealer Allan Katz, a trusted adviser. “Their instincts are terrific; they’re capable of making quick, visceral decisions.”

The couple commissioned Vermont architect John “Bud” Wilson to renovate the house. “We gutted it, room by room,” the wife says. “It was like plastic surgery.” Wilson redesigned the entrance and the master bedroom and added a dining wing and, eventually, several new structures, including a photog-





OPPOSITE ABOVE: Vermont bluestone steps lead to the main residence. The "silo" houses the master bedroom. OPPOSITE: Weathervanes, among them a circa 1915 Columbia or Goddess of Liberty and a circa 1865 centaur by A. L. Jewell, and *Temptation*, a carving by Henri Bernhardt, line the granite wall in the entrance hall. *Falling Man in Suit*, 1991, by Viola Frey is at rear right.

ABOVE: A circa 1904 iron clock face from the Stewart-Warner Corporation building in Chicago dominates the peaked ceiling in the living area. Antique wood gears decorate the adjacent wall. *Bedroom Blonde Doodle (3-D)* by Tom Wesselmann, 1986, is above the fireplace. The circa 1870 Indian trade figure is attributed to John Cromwell. Donghia sofas. Chair leather, Edelman.





**LEFT:** Oak chairs are grouped around a cherrywood table in the dining room. A wood Uncle Sam figure is at right. Antique carnival-game racehorses rest on the ledge at rear. Holly Hunt light fixture. **ABOVE:** The master bedroom features a semicircular headboard designed by Montreal-based architect Bernard Rosen. The Gabriel weathervane dates to circa 1860. The staircase leads to an office.

raphy studio for the wife—with an underground gallery (now home to an 1884 Phoenix Hose Company parade carriage)—and a guesthouse.

Wilson, who likes natural materials, laid the floors in maple and recycled chestnut and clad the walls in Douglas fir and cedar. Black and red granite, quartzite, Vermont blue-stone, orange and gray slate and Adirondack buff stone ground the spaces. He commissioned the renowned artist Albert Paley to fashion a sculptural pull for the front door. Early on, the wife asked West Palm Beach designer Tui Pranic to help with the interiors.

The 90-acre property has terraced gardens for outdoor sculpture. “They continually buy art, and I create places to display it,” Wilson explains.

The couple’s focus on art is everywhere. “Weathervanes with bullet holes, cigar-store figures, busts of historical figures like Lincoln’s secretary of

war—they all tell stories,” the husband explains. “I’ve put together many collections, and each one has a ‘cornerstone’ piece,” adds Fred Giampietro, a dealer who supplied the couple with multiple works. “What sets this collection apart is that it has 20 cornerstones. I’ve never seen so much folk art at such a high level in one place. The husband has the innate sense to know what the best is, and he is willing to take the financial risk to get it.”

Display of the collection begins at the front door. The entrance hall houses a parade of 19th- and 20th-century weathervanes, including a leaping stag, a centaur, a sea horse and a Columbia or Goddess of Liberty. “They gravitate to classic forms with surface integrity,” Giampietro says.

In the living room, the 23-foot-high peaked ceiling is dominated by a monumental iron clock face from Chicago, circa 1904, and five antique wood

gears. A carved wood American eagle, circa 1880, stands guard on a nearby balcony, wings outstretched, ready to swoop.

One of the owners’ favorite pieces, beneath the balcony, is a weathervane of the archangel Gabriel blowing his trumpet. Henry Foster, a Crown Point, New York, folk artist, made the six-foot-wide Gabriel in 1822, and it adorned the White Church steeple there until 2003, when it was stolen. The loss of the town’s treasure was well publicized.

“Someone tried to sell it to me, and I called the police,” recalls Giampietro, who recognized it immediately. After the weathervane was returned, Giampietro said he would be willing to act as an agent should the church decide to sell it. The church called. He sold it to the couple.

Another favorite, on a stand by the sofa, is a sculpture of a man in a tuxedo, elbow cocked. It is Rocco Pavese’s loving por-



ABOVE: An *ipe*-and-steel bridge connects the main house and the wife's photography studio. BELOW: The studio's underground Americana gallery displays a late-19th-century Phoenix Hose Company parade carriage. The ostrich carousel figure is by William Dentzel. At right is a tramp-art model of the Eiffel Tower, by Paul George Keilberg. RIGHT: Adjacent to the studio are a miniature golf course and an upper pond, both of which were designed by Wilson and planted by Loren Darling.

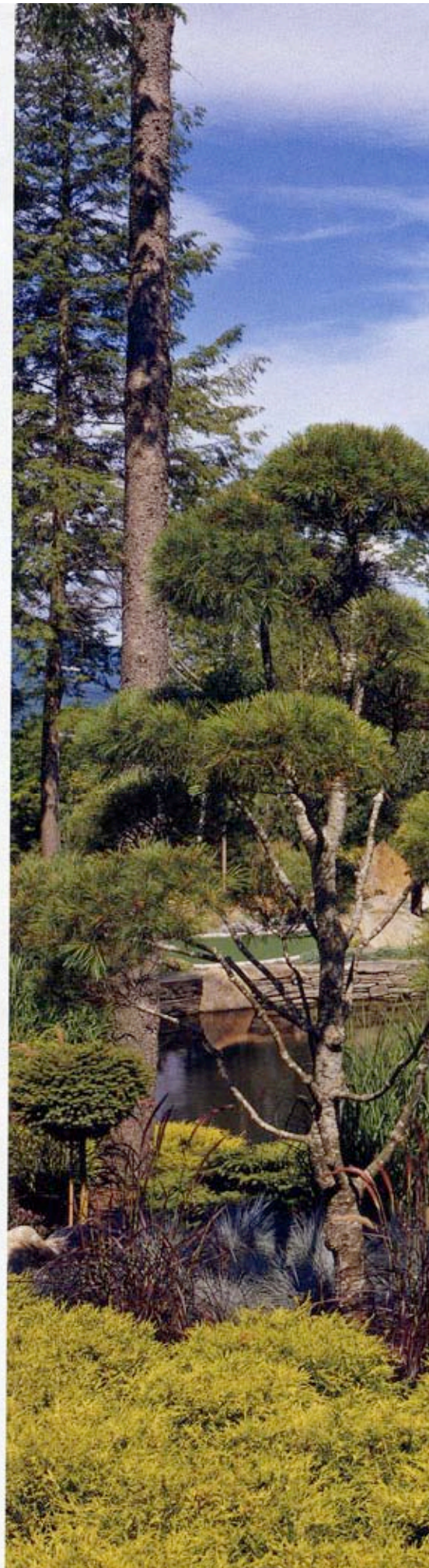


trait of his brother. (Pavese carved artificial limbs for a living in Grand Rapids, Michigan, in the early 1900s.)

Near a window is another cornerstone, a nearly life-size tout trade figure, a mustachioed racetrack dandy that attracted rubes to bet on the horses. It is a rare work; only a handful were made, and only two or three remain in private

hands. "It's an iconic piece; I chased it for years," says David Schorsch, the dealer who found it for the couple.

But do important sculptures fight each other for attention? Not at all, asserts Giampietro. "When you set the bar high, you have an evenness to the eye. Only a bad piece will reject itself in the company of the best." □







The 90-acre property, landscaped by H. Keith Wagner Partnership, includes a lower pond used for kayaking. The arrow weathervane, circa 1894, is from the Pepperell Mills building in Biddeford, Maine. *Constructed Head* by John Matusz, 2004, looks on from the far end.

