

Explore New England

VERMONT

Women's Carpentry students learn how to construct a garden shed.



Yestermorrow students built this treehouse on the property to be handicap accessible.



A student finishes up a project in artist Bette Ann Libby's Mosaic Workshop.



Ed Lowans lectures on sustainable design, one of the school's tenets.



PHOTOS BY NECEE REGIS FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Do it themselves

Design and construction skills in 150 hands-on courses draw about 1,000 collegian-to-retiree students to Yestermorrow

BY NECEE REGIS | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

WAITSFIELD — Beneath white birch- and pine tree-covered hills, the thwap-thwap of hammers and high-pitched whir of power tools echoed amid melodic trills of birds in the grass-scented air. Above the din, overlapping voices discussed how to best construct a garden shed.

"Before we can do diagonals we need a level surface."

"You'll have to measure again."

"Do I have to push the saw through the last quarter cut?"

At the Yestermorrow Design/Build School in the lush Mad River Valley, learning and doing are one and the same thing. Now in its 31st year, it's one of a handful of schools in the country teaching both design and construction skills. In a weeklong Women's Carpentry class that I observed for two days, 10 women wearing tool belts and serious expressions tackled skills involving planning, squaring, leveling, ham-

mering, and mastering power tools.

This is one of the 150 hands-on courses offered every year in design, construction, woodworking, and architectural craft with an emphasis on sustainable design and green building. Classes are as short as one day and — for the truly committed — as long as three-week intensives.

Kate Stephenson came to Yestermorrow as an intern nine years ago and is now its executive director.

"I've seen a lot of changes," said Stephenson. "Ten years ago, we had about 250 students come through here each year. Today we have about 1,000."

She attributes this growth to a combination of things. "The school is maturing and offering a wider variety of curriculum," she said. "And

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Mixed greens, hints of blue, blacktop . . .

By Jane Roy Brown

GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

WILMINGTON — The Irish saying "May the road rise to meet you," could have been uttered with Route 100 in mind. The highway rolls through a chain of river valleys

along the eastern edge of the Green Mountain National Forest, playing hide-and-reveal with racing water and time-smoothed summits. The towns of Wilmington, on the south, and Waitsfield, on the north, bracket the 90-mile section that skirts the national

forest. This is one of the most scenic road trips in New England, and summer — lacking both ice and distracted leaf peepers — is the most enjoyable time to drive it.

The trip begins about 2½ hours from Boston, 16 miles west of Brattleboro, where

Route 9 west descends into the crossroads town of Wilmington. Simply driving Route 100 from here to Waitsfield, with no stops, would take only a few hours. But antiques shops, waterfalls, hiking trails, and farm stands can

ROUTE 100, Page M7

Roll down the windows and roll along one of Vermont's most beautiful byways.



BILL REGAN FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

How-to design and build lessons are nailing it

► **YESTERMORROW**
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green building is becoming more part of the public conversation.”

Indeed, Yestermorrow's commitment to innovative and sustainable design strategies and natural building is a direct descendant of Vermont's Design/Build movement of the mid-1960s to mid-'70s.

The Design/Build movement evolved when a group of architects from Yale and the University of Pennsylvania moved to the area and began building free-form, improvised plywood houses on a hillside they dubbed “Prickly Mountain.” Many of the houses they built are still standing, and can be easily viewed without invading anyone's privacy from Loop Road off Prickly Mountain Road above Warren. (A warning: Loop Road is unpaved and rutted in places, making for a bumpy ride. I lost a hubcap in my travels. Make sure your vehicle can handle it.)

In 1990, after years of renting space, the school purchased a vacant inn on a 38-acre property along Route 100 between Waitsfield and Warren. Since then, the staff, faculty, and students have transformed the former Alpine Inn into a multi-use space with about 10,000 square feet of classrooms, design studios, offices, dormitories, library, woodshop, kitchen, and dining facilities.

“We deconstructed the main building and are rebuilding it,” said Stephenson. “We always have projects going on. We are trying to exemplify the sustainable design process we teach in our program.”

Stephenson estimates that half their students come from Vermont and New England, and the rest from almost every other state in the country. The ages



NECEE REGIS FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Ten women in a weeklong carpentry workshop at Yestermorrow Design/Build School in Waitsfield, Vt., learned what they needed to know to construct a garden shed.

range from class to class, from college students to retirees.

“Everyone is here because they really want to be here,” said Ed Lowans, a sustainable design consultant and instructor. “I usually go to bed about 10 p.m. and some students will work all night.”

Like Lowans, the faculty are all practicing professionals, including woodworkers, architects, builders, and master craftsmen and women.

Many students arrive with specific goals. Eva Griffin, a sociology major and sustainability and environmental science minor student at Berea College in Kentucky, is on a six-month internship to acquire skills to build a house.

“I've been here two weeks and it's incredibly empowering,” said Griffin. “Every day I do something I've never done before.”

“I've always wanted to do woodworking,” said Damaris

HANDS ARE AS HANDS DO
Look around Yestermorrow to see what you have always wanted to design or build, at www.boston.com/travel.

Bourland, a nurse and massage therapist from Maryland in the Women's Carpentry class.

“I grew up in the Midwest where girls were discouraged from taking shop. My son came here for the certificate and core program. When I turned 60, I said, It's my turn.” Bourland plans to return for the Power-tools for Women weekend workshop.

Isadora Dannin grew up in New York and will be a sophomore at Wesleyan University in the fall.

“You can't do this — actually build something — in an academic setting,” said Dannin. “It's good to know how to do something that's useful. I've always been in-

terested in art, design, and working with my hands.”

On-campus housing includes dorm rooms with bunk beds and, in warm weather, platforms in the woods for those who bring a tent. Interns live in cabins built by previous classes. One three-week participant showed off her bed in a Mongolian-style yurt. Visitors who desire less communal accommodations can find bed-and-breakfasts and inns in the area. I spent one night in the upper bunk in the dorm (comfy but noisy) and the other nearby at the Round Barn Inn (super comfy and quiet).

Communal meals are served buffet style, offering students a chance to relax and connect between classes. In addition to serving greens and vegetables from the garden, the kitchen crew works in partnership with local farmers to use as much local and organic food as possible.

Heidi Benjamin, the “whole

Yestermorrow Design/Build School

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www.yestermorrow.org
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banas and oranges, morning-glory muffins (regular and vegan), toast, and peanut butter.

On my second day, I shared a healthy lunch (chickpeas with eggplant and bokchoy, lemongrass rice salad, and mixed greens) with students who joked about “war wounds” sustained in the carpentry workshop.

Erin Martineau from Conway, Mass., sported an adhesive bandage on her finger from a run-in with an eye bolt.

“It's not bad,” said Martineau. “I work on a farm and have been learning about farming. Now I'm learning about building. More and more people want these skills. You can dip your toes in the water here and take a two-day class.” She particularly liked the power tools aspect of her class.

“I'm not sure about the power saw,” said Carol Rosenfeld of New York. “It's like the saw and I just went on a blind date, and I'm thinking, Do I really want to hang out with this person?”

Julia Rhode, lives in southern Vermont and works for a local company doing solar renovations. “Some girls dream of celebrities. Others dream of solar panels and power tools,” she said.

As I said goodbye and hauled my luggage to my van, I discovered its rear door stuck in the locked position. In another location I might have worried. At Yestermorrow, in less than a minute, the intern Malena Marvin appeared with a can of WD-40.

“The overall ethic here is you can do it yourself, you can push through and solve the problem,” said Marvin. “That's my favorite thing about the place. It's very real. Very hands on.”

Necce Regis can be reached at necceeregis@gmail.com.

THE BOSTON GLOBE'S

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