



THIS PHOTO: The garage of Christie Sumner's newly built 2,500-square-foot home is painted red to mimic the attached barns of classic New England farmhouses. A grove of cut evergreen trees are placed in tubs on the front porch and set aglow with multiple strands of white lights to signal a warm welcome.



To *Grandmother's* **HOUSE**

OVER THE RIVER? CHECK. THROUGH THE WOODS?
CHECK. WHEN THE FAMILY ARRIVES AT THIS FARMHOUSE,
IT'S TIME TO GET THE HOLIDAY PARTY STARTED.

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A FEW YEARS BACK, CHRISTIE SUMNER was at a fork in a country road: Should she shore up the old Vermont farmhouse she and her husband had lived in for 40 years or start fresh from the ground up?

Recently widowed, Christie toggled between preserving the past, living easier in the present, and being ready for the future. Ultimately, she opted to design and build a new farmhouse and sell the old one, which was moved up the road. The traditionally styled house was patterned after the previous one, but it presents fewer maintenance headaches and is tailored to some essentials on Christie's wish list.

To that end, she tapped the talents of architect Mary Beth Stilwell, from the nearby town of Lincoln, Vermont. "She stayed with me in the old farmhouse for a while," Christie says, "so she knew how I lived and what I liked. I wanted light and I wanted air. I also wanted the house to work for me as I age. Most of all, I wanted room for my family to visit."

Holiday visits are the best, where all hands—small, medium, large—deck the halls and take part in cookie-baking marathons, crafting, and holiday



trimming. Large uncovered windows scoop in the cool winter light as well as the long views to pastures, trees, and hills. The open floor plan, plus pale gray and snowy white walls offer up breathing space.

Against this clean, serene backdrop, seven grandkids, ages 2 to 11, add most of the color; the rest is served up in simple, classic Christmas decorations pulled from family traditions and the home's country surroundings. "I have been known to top my own tree," Christie says. "I just climb up and top it. Other years I get help from nature. We get a pretty good blow here sometimes and trees blow down around the barn. I cut the top off one and save it for Christmas."

The tree is bedazzled with old and new ornaments, and fresh green wreaths and garlands—such as the lush swag that frames the entry to the living area—are left unadorned to match Christie's streamlined,



natural style. Keeping holiday decorating easy means there is more time to spend together, especially romping around the property. "We're outdoor people," Christie says, "so we spend a lot of time enjoying outdoor adventures when we gather."

Whether indoors or out, the family uses the holidays to create new traditions and build on old ones, traditions she hopes her children and grandchildren will continue. "I wrote in concrete, 'Christie Sumner and four generations,' because I hope they hang onto this place," she says. "It's written in stone now so maybe that will help assure it." &

OPPOSITE, TOP LEFT Crafted pom-poms add cheer when wired to a ready-made wreath of mixed greens. **OPPOSITE, TOP RIGHT** Christie Sumner's son, Chad, enjoys some classic outdoor fun with his wife, Emily, and sons Will and Henry. **ABOVE** Baskets and built-ins corral clutter in this 2,500-square-foot home. The deep window seat offers plenty of seating and snuggling space—and a perch for story time. **LEFT** A lush swag of greens adorns rustic beams salvaged from an old mill to frame the living room. Holiday decorations, like the furnishings, are few but boldly scaled for a modern take on farmhouse style.



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—HOMEOWNER CHRISTIE SUMNER





OPPOSITE, TOP LEFT

A simple yet chic, made-in-Vermont farm table and bench pair easily with chairs that nod to midcentury modern style. The low-profile combo is ready to host crafting sessions with the grandkids or holiday dinners without cluttering the view. **OPPOSITE,**

BOTTOM LEFT A dollop of royal icing affixes gingerbread cookies to black foam-core board for a fresh take on an Advent calendar. **LEFT** The

new country-flavor kitchen is open and light, with a bank of windows taking the place of upper cabinets. A hardworking island provides the storage the cabinets would have offered and creates a perfect platform for gingerbread decorating for Christie and her granddaughter, Piper. Mixed-material stools lend an industrial edge, and orange pendants punctuate the clean design statement.

THIS PHOTO In the attic loft, ingenious bunks, each with a trundle, create a kind of “cousin camp” at Christmas and whenever the family gathers. “In theory the loft was designed so all seven grandkids can sleep there,” Christie says. “If they would actually go to sleep!” Grandchildren Lila and Grant enjoy some quiet time in the vaulted space.





LEFT As a child, Christie coveted her brother's train set, so he recently gifted it to her. Henry is on board with this Christmas classic. **BELOW** Pom-poms were added to knit stockings to hide the small cup hooks that suspend them from stairway treads. The stairwell is extra wide to create more storage behind shiplap-sided walls. Unadorned greens add natural beauty to the banister.

