

Picturing Home

Architectural photographer Susan Teare BY AMY LILLY

When Susan Teare arrives at the Burlington Furniture Company, where a selection of her architectural photographs hang, she apologizes for not looking up to par. It's 10 a.m., but she has been up since dawn shooting a landscape in Charlotte. Teare is the kind of photographer who waits for the perfect natural light to do a job, and she couldn't pass up the morning's rarified air and cloudless start.

As one looks around at the exhibit — photo boards displaying interiors and exteriors of residences created by the South Burlington firm Peregrine Design/Build — it becomes clear that natural light is the key factor in bringing the spaces Teare shoots to life. A modern, clean-lined bathroom looks perfectly lit without a hint of sunlight; the only artificial light, the vanity fixture, simply adds a bar of warm yellow to the gray and white surfaces. Exteriors of fully lit homes against evening skies that retain a daylight-blue hue recall Magritte paintings in their arresting liminality.

Teare got her start as a professional photographer with Peregrine shortly after moving to Vermont with her husband in 1996. At that time, photography was still her hobby. A Maine native, Teare had studied art history as an undergraduate at Bowdoin and sneaked into a photography class for an entire semester. "I was never caught," she says with a chuckle.

Later, after her grandfather's death, Teare opened a closet to discover his Hasselblad camera, a Swedish brand famous for documenting the first trip to the moon. It hadn't been used in years but still worked perfectly. Laying aside her Minolta, Teare started playing around with the vintage medium-format camera. Among the initial pictures she took with it in Vermont were portraits of her first child — she now has a 16- and a 14-year-old — and the first child of her new friend, Peregrine founder Tim Frost.

Frost recalls that, after he asked Teare to shoot some of the firm's work so it could apply for awards from the Home Builders & Remodelers Association of Northern Vermont, "we immediately went from winning no projects



Susan Teare

MATTHEW THOMPSON



COURTESY OF SUSAN TEARE

to winning everything. She gave us a big competitive advantage."

Teare started working for Frost in marketing and sales in the early 2000s, and her photographs soon led her to freelance jobs with other architecture firms. Frost encouraged her, though Teare had her doubts. "I just wasn't sure about doing this as a business," she recalls. "I didn't want to make my hobby a work thing and not have it be fun anymore."

Teare has never regretted going professional, she says, adding, "I'm always thanking Tim for believing in me and trusting me." Now using a digital Hasselblad, she shoots regularly for about

20 architectural firms in the New England area, and will soon release a second book on architectural salvage, published by Norton, with coauthor Joanne Palmisano — who took over Teare's marketing and sales position at Peregrine after she left it.

Teare's photographs have appeared in *This Old House*, *Better Homes and Gardens*, *Design New England*, *Fine Homebuilding* and a host of other magazines. Fans of the website Houzz.com may have seen her work without realizing it; fellow photographers most likely know of it from *Professional Photographer Magazine's* June 2013 feature on her. And, last year, Teare became a stock

photographer for Getty Images, a global distributor of digital still imagery.

What keeps Teare immersed in and loving the job is the challenge of finding "what's happening in a space," she says. Usually, she spends an entire day following the light through a house, and more time getting to know the resident family and its rhythms. She strips away clutter before a shoot but often leaves traces of the residents in her photos, as in the pair of flip-flops in one detail shot, part of a montage of interiors at the Burlington Furniture exhibit. In her favorite shot in the show, depicting a South Hero vacation-home kitchen bathed in a calming morning light, Teare included the family's young daughter curled up in a rocker with a book.

Teare, who lives in a historic house in Essex Junction, says she is often floored by the amount of thinking and detail that architects and designers bring to a space. She attempts to bring that out in her photos, whether she's shooting a historical renovation of an oceanside residence on Cape Cod or a Logan Airport expansion, both of which she photographed earlier in the week we spoke to her.

Capturing the architect's intent, or the problem solved by a remodeled space, is one of two aims Teare pursues in every shot. The other is "to create a sense of place, so that someone looks at it and says, 'I don't know why, but I would just really like to live there.'"

That's generally the effect of the Burlington Furniture Company show, which is called "The Art of Place." With an elegant mounting system devised by Peregrine architect Cliff Deetjen and photo boards printed by Light-Works, the exhibit highlights particularly beautiful residences Peregrine has created or remodeled over its 25-year history.

Teare still shoots for Peregrine regularly, but Frost no longer specifies which shots he wants. "Whenever she asks me what I want her to take," he says with a chuckle, "I just tell her she knows best." ☺

INFO

"The Art of Place," Susan Teare's photography celebrating 25 years of Peregrine Design/Build, is on view at Burlington Furniture Company through October 31. susanteare.com