

BY TED CUSHMAN

Learning by Doing

Yestermorrow Design/Build School, located in rural Waitsfield, Vt., is many things to many people. The organization is perhaps best known as a place for handy owner-builders to pick up the trade skills and design methods they need to craft their own personalized homes or additions. It also has a reputation as a reality check for architecture students, where they can get their hands dirty on a real construction project and learn how to tether their imaginations to an actual jobsite that's constrained by the hard truths of real materials and labor.

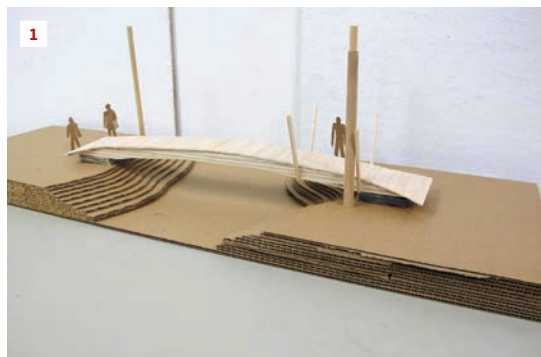
But you might not think of Yestermorrow as a place where an experienced contractor or tradesperson can take a few days to hone his skills and broaden his capabilities. However, that's exactly what the school is to Mike Horgan (horgandesignbuild.com), a builder and remodeler based on Cape Cod in Massachusetts.

Horgan has spent years running a busy company. When the opportunity arises, he told *JLC* recently, he'll gladly take a trip up to Yestermorrow between jobs for a design-build exercise that's part fun and part learning—like the arched footbridge over a brook pictured on this page.

In an email, Horgan told *JLC*: “My buddy Ryan Adanalian is an architect working for Board and Vellum out in Seattle. We got to be friends when we did a timber-framing workshop at Yestermorrow a few years earlier. Ryan emailed me out of the blue one day and said he was going to take a vacation and hit Yestermorrow for a little workshop, and that I should cruise up and do it too.

“It turned out to be a community design-build workshop with Steve Badanes and the Jersey Devils. I am a huge fan of those guys. So I cruised up to Vermont, hung out with the Devils day and night for two weeks straight, and learned everything I could possibly glean from them over that time period. We designed in the studio and built that bridge largely in the parking lot. We did the install, and then the next day they were having a party to commemorate it ... but I had to get home, because I had a foundation to pour.

“It was intense. It's a design-build challenge; you don't have any idea of what you're doing until you arrive the first day, visit the site that's been donated, and immediately begin the charrette. You stay up day and night non-stop for two weeks, designing and then building. I love it.”



(1) A conceptual model from the charrette; (2) Truss-wrestling exercise; (3) The finished project graces a Vermont meadow and woods.

Photos by Mike Horgan and Ryan Adanalian