



After the FLOOD

STORY BY NANCY E. BERRY ♦ PHOTOS BY CAROLYN BATES

With a little help from friends and neighbors, a Vermont homeowner restores her flood-damaged 1890s cottage once the waters subside.



ABOVE: Rains from Hurricane Irene caused the Deerfield River to overflow, flooding Wilmington's historic downtown—and Bettina Krampetz's house (far left). **OPPOSITE:** Two years after the storm, Bettina's 1890s cottage is good as new.

One doesn't often associate hurricanes with Vermont, but on August 28, 2011, the town of Wilmington—a picturesque, National Register-listed village on the southern edge of the state—was hit by the after-effects of Hurricane Irene. More than seven inches of rain fell between sunrise and sunset, causing the Deerfield River to spill over its banks and into the surrounding streets and houses.

"There hasn't been a natural disaster like this since the flood of 1938," says Joseph Cincotta, a local architect and volunteer first responder. That flood washed away countless bridges, roads, and railroads; in similar fashion, Irene caused roaring river waters to take down trees and utility poles, wash out roads, and sweep propane tanks and even cars down streets.

Joseph volunteered to assess damage to the town's historical buildings. His first visit was to neighbor Bettina Krampetz to

survey her modest 1890s Italianate cottage, which is bordered by the Deerfield River and Beaver Brook. At 7:30 a.m. on the day that Irene struck, the river began to rise above the flood plain. "By 10:30 a.m., the water was halfway up the basement stairs," Bettina says, "and I knew it was time to go."

She rode out the storm with friends Barbara LeVan and Eric Sprenger, whose house luckily sits uphill. "By the time Eric came to get me, my car tires were submerged in eight inches of water," she

notes. "We cooked a lasagna on the grill—the whole town had lost power—and waited through the night for the storm to settle."

The following day, Bettina returned to her house. "It was scary to see how much damage there was throughout town," she says. By then the water had subsided, but it still engulfed the basement and two inches of the first floor. Bettina looked to Joseph for some reassurance that repairs were possible, but first she had to deal with one inescapable truth: In about a day or two, mold would start to set in, and the architect did not recommend staying in the house.

Joseph's assessment held some positive news, however: "The house hadn't been forcefully removed from its foundation, so there was no structural damage." Even so, several fissures had formed in the first-floor wood flooring, and the kitchen's

ABOVE, FROM LEFT: BETTINA KRAMPETZ PHOTO; ROLAND SCHNEIDER PHOTOS



TOP: ROLAND SCHNEIDER PHOTO

Wilmington's Recovery

Incorporated in 1751, Wilmington is the perfect model of a 19th-century Vermont town. Thanks to its more than 60 historical buildings, ranging from late Colonial to Queen Anne (plus a few Shingle Style structures built by famed architect Stanford White), the town earned a spot on the National Register in 1980. The village was once located on "Old Hill," but moved downhill in 1833 to be closer to the water power of the Deerfield River.

The destruction from the 2011 flood was substantial: Wilmington lost 40 businesses, 20 apartments, and its Municipal Services building. All town buildings sustained some level of damage, from flooded basements to total losses.

But thanks to nonprofit organizations such as the Wilmington Fund VT, businesses are getting help to restore the affected architectural gems. The fund supports Wilmington's recovery by raising money to help repair damaged buildings and to promote commerce and business activity through grants, low-interest loans, real estate ownership, and other investment opportunities and partnerships. Julie Lineberger, who works closely with the organization, estimates that almost two years after the flood, the town is 70 to 75 percent restored.

ABOVE: Bettina got a FEMA grant to help her restore the first floor of her house, which was inundated during the flood.

RIGHT: The flood destroyed many downtown businesses, including Bartleby's Books (top); today, the town is back on its feet (bottom).

lower cabinets were waterlogged.

In addition, "the basement's water heater had broken loose, the oil tank was up on its back legs, and the floor was covered in mud," Joseph notes. "Carpeting and rugs soaked up much of the liquid, which helped save the plaster walls." He determined that all-new wiring and plumbing were required, as well as a new water heater. "I was able to allay Bettina's concerns by breaking down the needed renovations into constituent parts," he says.

Bail Out

The first call of action was to get rid of moisture. Luckily, Eric Sprenger is not only a close friend, but also an accomplished craftsman and furnituremaker. He set up sawhorses in the front yard and started ripping out carpet and pulling up damp rugs with the help of Barbara and Bettina. The house had no electricity, gas, or clean water, although the toilet, which operated on the town sewer system, was working. Even with the looming

mold issue, Bettina decided to remain in the house—on the second floor—until she had a plan in place.

A few days after the storm, a representative from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), accompanied by Julie Lineberger (Joseph's wife, who was helping households register for assistance), came by to assess monetary damages. By September 7, Bettina had received a \$3,650 check from FEMA.

Four days after the storm, there was

another knock on Bettina's door—a group from Mount Snow Ski Resort had arrived to help clear the basement of debris. Pretty much everything had to go because of the floodwater's toxicity. (During floods, rivers can pick up toxic substances due to chemical spills or treatment plant overflows.)

On September 13, a South Carolina-based team from the Southern Baptist Convention Disaster Relief organization visited and volunteered its expertise in decontaminating houses from floodwaters

Flood Prep 101

Flooding can happen anywhere, but certain areas are at higher risk. (To find out if you live in one of these areas, visit msc.fema.gov.) To prepare your house for a flood, FEMA recommends:

- ◆ **Buying flood insurance**—standard homeowner's insurance doesn't cover flooding.
- ◆ **Elevating the furnace, water heater, and electric panel** in your home if you live in an area that has a high flood risk.
- ◆ **Consider installing "check valves"** to prevent floodwater from backing up into the drains of your home.
- ◆ **If feasible, construct barriers** to stop floodwater from entering the building, and seal basement walls with water-proofing compounds.



and mold. They determined that the lower kitchen cabinets and first-floor flooring were too water-damaged to save. Bettina worked side by side with the group to empty cupboards and haul furnishings to the second floor. Even her piano was put on a trailer and stored inside a dry barn. After the cabinets and flooring were removed, the group power-washed the basement and first floor and then sprayed an EPA-registered disinfectant and fungicide to combat any growing mold spores.

Better Than New

Once she realized how extensive the restoration would be, Bettina decided

to move out of the house, taking refuge at the home of friends who were traveling in France. Because the damage was more than she originally estimated, she reapplied for additional FEMA assistance, and was awarded an additional \$20,000 in grants from FEMA, the United Way, and Southeastern Vermont Community Action. She also received \$2,500 from insurance claims, all of which would help her purchase the required mechanical systems, as well as new flooring and kitchen cabinets.

Once funding was in place, Bettina and Eric developed an overall plan for the restoration. "I wanted to keep the

new space simple and as close to the original as possible," she notes. With the floors gone, Eric noticed that the original subflooring was sagging and installed support beams in the basement to lift it slightly. "If I jacked up the flooring too much, the house could potentially become unstable, and the plaster walls could crumble," he notes.

With the subfloor fixed, the next project was to install new flooring. "We wanted to make the floor as level as possible—something difficult to do in an old house," says Eric. "It took us two weeks just to frame and shim." Once the framing was in place, his team put down a ¾"

plywood subfloor and then the maple flooring. "We had to go back and trim the door bottoms to accommodate the ¾" rise," says Eric.

Next, he added insulation and drywall to the kitchen's outer wall, behind the lower cabinets, where none had existed before. He then installed modest stock cabinets and a soapstone countertop. Meanwhile, the first-floor bathroom received a new linoleum floor, the house was rewired, and a new water heater was installed. The oil tank had taken on water and had to be emptied and dried before being refitted. The downstairs received a fresh

coat of paint, and Eric salvaged the old kitchen cabinets to make a new linen cupboard for the bathroom.

On November 5, Bettina moved back into her second floor while Eric completed the rest of the repairs. "I had running water in the bath and a toaster and microwave to cook my meals," she says. By December 1, she had running water and a new stove in the kitchen.

"I love my old house and didn't expect it to flood in my lifetime," Bettina says. "I'm so glad to be back here, and am so grateful to all the volunteers who helped in the process." 🐾

LEFT & INSET: Floodwaters damaged the kitchen cabinets beyond repair; new stock cabinets and a soapstone countertop were cost-effective replacements. **TOP:** Salvageable elements of the kitchen cabinets were repurposed in the bathroom. **ABOVE:** New maple flooring was installed throughout the first floor.