

CIRCUS CAMP IN VERMONT



The master plan for the combined children's circus and summer camp in northern Vermont divides the area into two major clusters. The great barn (1) with its octagonal ends and flags is the main building in the troupe area, while the summer camp centers on an octagonal training barn (2). All drawings: Sandra Vitzthum Architect



PROJECT: Children's Circus Summer Camp, northern Vermont
ARCHITECT: Sandra Vitzthum Architect, LLC, Montpelier, VT

Sandra Vitzthum, who describes herself as a traditional rather than a Classical architect, drew on her love and knowledge of Vermont and its summer camp heritage to create the master plan for a summer camp that trains children for the circus. The same nonprofit organization that runs the summer camp also operates a children's circus that tours the East Coast. In 2001, the organization decided to consolidate the summer camp and the circus troupe into one location, a 100-acre site in northern Vermont. Sandra Vitzthum was asked to design a "gay and lively gypsy camp environment" for the group.

"They came to me asking for a gypsy encampment," says Vitzthum. "For many years, they had an off-site summer camp, yet they wanted to consolidate everything into one place, their lovely old farm, with a farmhouse. At one time, it was a large dairy farm.

"I tried to blend farm vernacular and summer camp vernacular with that goal. There's a long tradition of summer camps for children in

Vermont," says Vitzthum. "For at least a century, people have been sending their children to Vermont. Some buildings in the master plan, like the cabins, were pretty straightforward, but the training barn and great barn were original ideas. I started with an old Vermont building type, the round barn, and transformed it to accommodate one or two circus rings, acrobatic equipment and spectators."

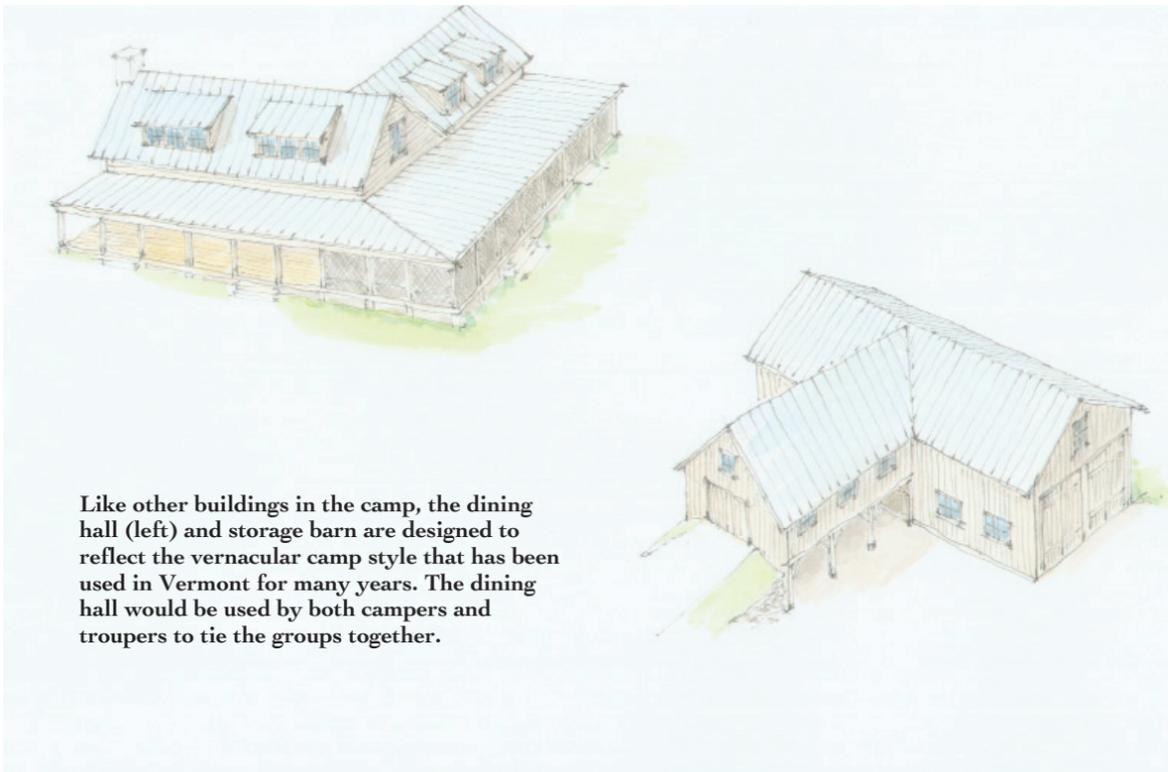
Vitzthum's master plan includes more than two dozen buildings in two major clusters, one for the circus troupe near the existing farmhouse and one for the summer camp, located in the woods to the west of the troupe area. The summer camp area includes eight cabins to accommodate 64 campers, a dining hall, a small administration building, bathhouses, practice tents and an octagonal performance barn. "The summer camp setting is wooded," says Vitzthum, "and there's lots of outdoor space."

The octagonal barn is the focus of the camp; its sides swing up to become temporary roofs so the audience actually sits outside the performance space. The training barn was designed to be used by children who are learning acrobatics and circus skills and for small shows.

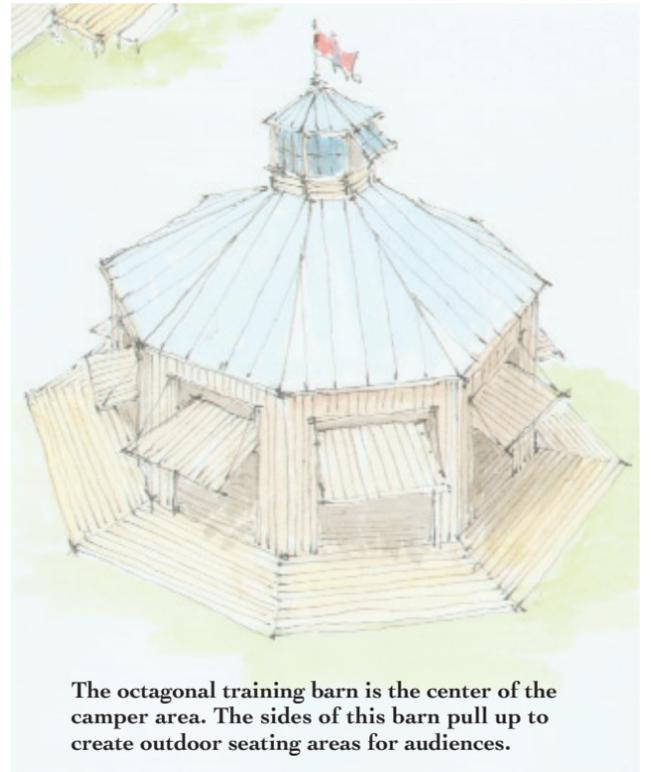
The other cluster, closer to the farmhouse, is for the troupers who currently live in trailers. It includes cabins, the existing farmhouse, which is used for administration, practice and performance tents, and the great barn. Vitzthum set this barn on the 45x90-ft. footprint of an original dairy barn and modified it with octagonal ends to incorporate two circus performance



The great barn, located near the farmhouse, is on the footprint of an original dairy barn. Vitzthum took the 45x90-ft. rectangle and added two octagonal ends to accommodate two circus performance rings. Its modern steel frame for aerial acrobatics would be interwoven with a traditional post-and-beam construction.



Like other buildings in the camp, the dining hall (left) and storage barn are designed to reflect the vernacular camp style that has been used in Vermont for many years. The dining hall would be used by both campers and troupers to tie the groups together.



The octagonal training barn is the center of the camper area. The sides of this barn pull up to create outdoor seating areas for audiences.

rings. The great barn combines traditional post-and-beam structure with a lightweight metal frame for the trapeze artists and is topped with a cupola and flags.

The area for the troupe accommodates 32 troupers and counselors. It includes the great barn, tents for practicing and performing, storage buildings for props and costumes, cabins and bathhouses. Most of the buildings are timber framed with clapboard or shingle and metal roofs. All of the sleeping and eating structures are permanent buildings.

"The troupers are usually older and actually perform on the road," Vitzthum explains. "The campers are younger children, plus some older ones, who are training." Other than troupers and campers, another two to

three dozen people are involved, including cooks, staff, coaches, directors and support people. The coaches have their own little cluster and a few stay in the administrative buildings.

According to the plan, troupers would eat with the campers in the big dining hall. "The dining hall ties the whole complex together," says Vitzthum. "With indoor and outdoor gathering spaces for campfires, movies and games, it is the heart of the organization."

Although the camp hasn't been able to set a date to begin construction, because it was one of the many nonprofits that suffered in the wake of 9/11, it is still hopeful about moving ahead with the plan sometime in the future. ♦



The cabins for coaches (top) and troupers are clustered in their respective areas. Cabins for the campers are similar in size and style.