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Building a Dream Home on the Cape

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Boston home

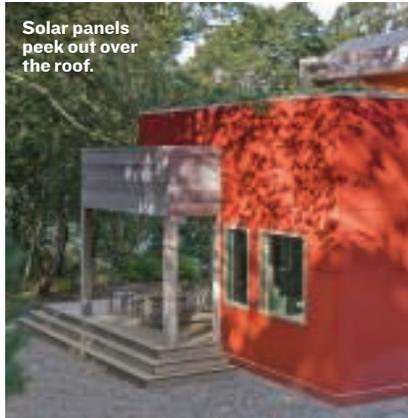
NEXT GENERATION DESIGN

BOSTONMAGAZINE.COM SPRING 2010

GOING GREENER

How one couple rebuilt their summer home while reducing its environmental impact.

BY HILLARY GERONEMUS



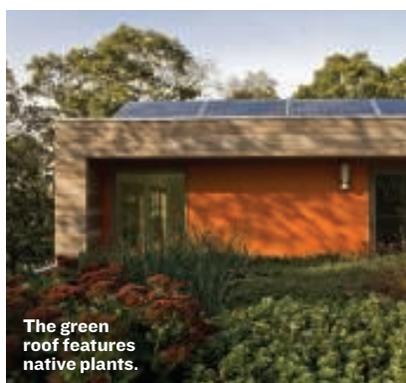
The Project

Tessa and Dan English's 980-square-foot Cape Cod vacation home needed a major renovation to accommodate year-round living. Because Tessa's parents had built the house in 1954 to be as green as possible, finding the right designer was important. Tessa knew when she met with Boston's Zero Energy Design in 2006 that she'd found a firm that could continue her family's low-impact tradition. After much deliberation, she and Dan decided to raze the original house and create a completely winterized home.



The Construction

North Eastham-based contractor Cape Associates, which had recently completed an eco-friendly house nearby, worked with Zero Energy to salvage as much of the original house's material as possible, including the decking, landscape pavers, and interior doors. Other pieces of the first house were recovered by friends for use in their own homes. From start to finish, construction took only eight months. "I was so surprised at how smooth the whole process was," says Tessa.



The Details

Because of the house's location—on blustery Pilgrim Lake in Orleans—it had to meet stringent wind-load codes. This meant installing impact-resistant windows and a firmer wall structure than usual. Zero Energy wrapped the home's bulked-up exterior in rigid insulation board and used spray-foam insulation to seal wall cavities. Before the house was finished, the family decided to create one more window in the living room; the last-minute change added much-needed light (and a great view).

GREENEST ROOF

A rooftop garden with hardy local plants keeps interior spaces cool.

REDUCE AND REUSE

Wood from the previous home is now a platform beneath the green roof.

FRIENDLY LUMBER

The decking is made of responsibly grown garapa wood.

GET OUTSIDE

The second-floor roof deck provides outdoor space to enjoy the lake view, bird watch, and relax with friends.

CLEAR CHOICE

A glass handrail meets safety codes and doesn't block the view.

SHADOW CASTING

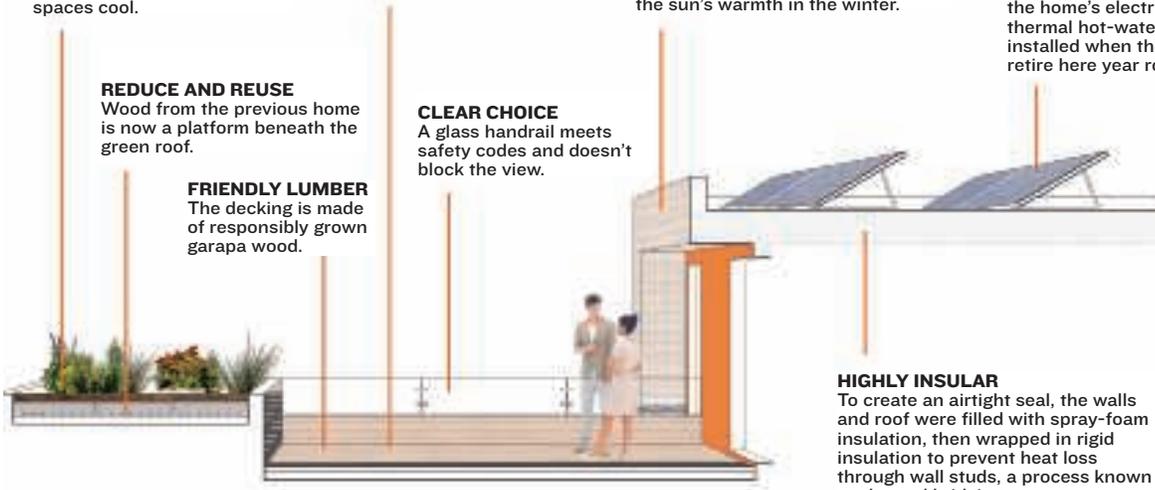
Zero Energy designed the house's deep overhangs to shade south-facing glass in the summer, but let in the sun's warmth in the winter.

ENERGY PLANT

Photovoltaic panels on the roof generate 30 percent of the home's electricity. A solar thermal hot-water system will be installed when the owners retire here year round.

HIGHLY INSULAR

To create an airtight seal, the walls and roof were filled with spray-foam insulation, then wrapped in rigid insulation to prevent heat loss through wall studs, a process known as thermal bridging.



A view from the deck into the kitchen.



The minimalist living room.

The Result

The new 2,000-square-foot, two-story house—which added a bedroom, bathroom, office, roof deck, porch, and insulated basement to the original house's plan—only took up an additional 225 square feet. The second-story deck, made from Forest Stewardship Council–certified garapa wood, affords better views of the lake than the original one-story house did, and provides much-needed outdoor space for entertaining. Together, the solar panels, radiant heating, high-efficiency boiler, and Energy Star appliances save the family an estimated \$3,500 per year in energy costs compared with a conventional house of the same size.

The Bottom Line

While Zero Energy had a hand in just about everything—from the home's layout to the kitchen cabinets—the green roof design was Tessa's idea. Paying homage to her mother, a botanist, she chose native plants, such as sedum neon and green spruce, that will bloom at different times of the year. When Zero Energy architect Stephanie Horowitz suggested bright red, low-VOC exterior paint, the family was a little skeptical. But after a well-timed trip to Mexico, where boldly colored houses are the norm, Tessa came around. "Because our ancestors came from Scotland, my parents named the house Suleskerry, which means 'go island,'" says Tessa. "Now we joke that it's Suleskerry La Hacienda. And we couldn't be happier here." n

INTRODUCING THE

**UP-AND-COMING DESIGN
PROS WHO WILL SHAPE
THE WAY WE BUILD OUR
HOMES, DECORATE OUR
LIVING ROOMS, SPEND
OUR FREE TIME, AND
THINK ABOUT THE CITY
IN THE DECADE TO COME.**

by Rachel Levitt and Brigid Sweeney

NEXT GENERATION DESIGN



ARCHITECTS



A Truro residence by Zero Energy Design.

GREEN MACHINE
Stephanie Horowitz, 27, Zero Energy Design



Stephanie Horowitz and her partners started laying the groundwork for Zero Energy Design (ZED) while studying at Cornell University. They founded the school's first Solar Decathlon team, ultimately designing and building an 800-square-foot, ultra-energy-efficient home for the annual U.S. Department of Energy competition. (They won second place.) It was at Cornell that they discovered the value of having several experts under one roof, including engineers and business types. After a year at large New York firm NBBJ, Horowitz joined her former teammates in Boston to establish a multidisciplinary company dedicated to green design. "It was a calculated risk," says the designer, "but I didn't want to follow the traditional model of working until my mid-40s before going out on my own." Since then, ZED has scored several projects on the Cape (including the residence featured on page 54) and is currently wrapping up the design of a house in Little Compton, Rhode Island.

DIY PHENOM
Chaewon Kim, 34, Uni-Architecture



Just two years after earning her degree from Harvard, Chaewon Kim partnered with her Swiss-born husband, Beat Schenk, 44, to start Uni-Architecture, a design/build firm based in Cambridge. As upstarts, they didn't let a lack of clients stop them: While Schenk continued his day job at Cannon Design, the two began to design and build house after tiny, modern house on a small plot near the Alewife MBTA station. They toiled weekends and nights, building with their own hands and often relying on how-to books for guidance. Their whimsical approach to residential design appealed to Cambridge intellectuals and quickly sold. The projects also brought them international attention and plenty of press, so much so that Kim and Schenk's talents are now being sought in New York and as far away as China.



Two homes by Uni-Architecture.



The "East Sixth Street House" by Touloukian Touloukian Architecture.

MODERN MASTER
Theodore Touloukian, 41, Touloukian Touloukian Architecture + Urban Design

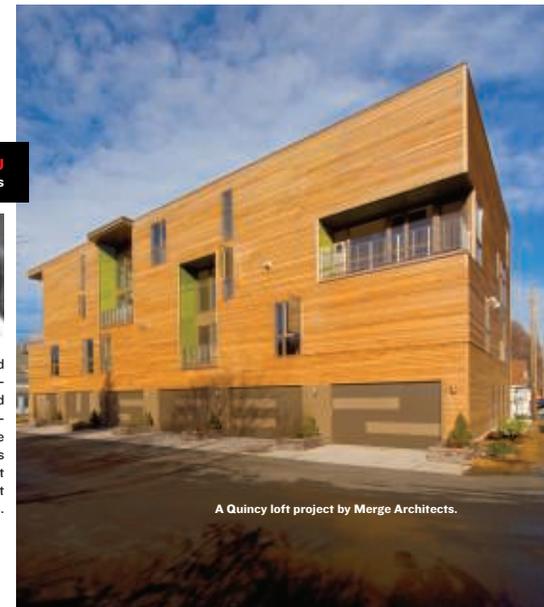


It takes a certain amount of optimism to leave a big firm—and in Ted Touloukian's case, a willing partner. After spending almost a decade working for others, Ted and his wife, Susan, launched a partnership in late 2003. The couple, who met while studying architecture at the University of Michigan, call their warm, contemporary aesthetic "contextual modern." Case in point: their design for the tiny "East Sixth Street House" in South Boston, built for a local developer. It required serious planning skills to squeeze 1,825 square feet onto the petite lot, give the home a distinct presence while meeting a \$145-per-square-foot budget, and avoid offending the more conservative Southie neighbors. Bright and airy, with deep light wells and glass railings, the resulting condo addition won a Small Firms/Small Projects award from the Boston Society of Architects in 2008. Currently the Touloukians are finishing up a pavilion in the new Riverside park on Memorial Drive in Cambridge, among smaller projects. They live in South Boston with their three young children.

LOFT GURU
Elizabeth Whittaker, 39, Merge Architects



Three years out of graduate school in 2003, Elizabeth Whittaker, then 33, decided to end her tenure at Brian Healy Architects and strike out on her own. Thus began round-the-clock design sessions in the office of her Fort Point Channel home, which yielded a series of elegant, moderately priced loft interiors for friends of friends of friends. Using her own loft as a laboratory, Whittaker was able to find ways to divide up space without using studs and drywall. Innovative designs featuring glass as walls, movable partitions, and plenty of custom-built storage furniture earned Merge Architects a slew of awards and an expanding list of clients. (If you've ever walked into a MiniLuxe nail salon or Central Square's Middlesex Lounge, you've seen Merge's unique, minimalist work.) Now a mother of three, Whittaker has a sunny office just a few blocks from home, and increasingly prominent projects.



A Quincy loft project by Merge Architects.