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PHOTOGRAPHS BY THOMAS OLCOTT

the perfect house

living on the leading edge of sustainability



the island of nantucket

draws many vacationers from this neck of New England. Its appeal lies in the cobblestoned downtown, the windswept dunes, and a generally simpler way of life. What you may not have heard yet, however, is that it's also now home to a house that was built with an eye to the past—and the future.

This lean, green, living machine sits on a ten-acre site on Esther's Island, a small spit of land just off the tip of the western shore of Nantucket. Yes, an island off an island. Nantucket resident Alan Worden went to check out one particular cottage for sale. "It was one of those 'aha!' moments," says Worden. "When I got there and got to that site and looked around, it was truly one of the most spectacular sites I'd seen anywhere in the world."

Worden is CEO of Scout Real Estate Capital, a resort and real-estate development company. He was intrigued by the property not only for his own personal use, but because he saw an opportunity to test Scout Capital's sustainable-living strategies—in essence, to use the Esther's Island house as a laboratory for environmentally friendly building practices that will be used in developing large-scale resort properties.

The renovation of the three-bedroom, 2,400-square-foot property began in October 2007. Worden gathered a team of construction specialists, energy experts, and designers, all of whom looked at the project through environmentally sensitive eyes. In every instance they examined how they could have a positive or at least neutral impact on the island. "Every renovation detail has been thoughtfully designed," says Jennifer Shalley, Scout's director of operations. "We used renewable materials in the design process and we've powered the site with clean-energy alternatives."

The original cottage was too close to the edge of the harbor, so one of the first orders of business was to relocate the house site 50 feet back from the shoreline. Given the island's naturally fragile ecosystem, it was of utmost importance to disrupt as little of the land as

This experiment in sustainable living uses two different alternative-energy sources from three separate systems—a vertical windmill and two different kinds of solar panels.





solar panels depends on where you are." So the team chose a set of five-kilowatt photovoltaic solar panels for electricity, and a flat-panel thermal solar array for hot water. Also adding to the power system is a 17-foot-tall, five-kilowatt, vertical-axis wind turbine. Except this doesn't look like your average windmill. "It's absolutely silent," says Worden. "It reads as a solid object for birds. It's a beautiful thing. When we all saw it turning for the first time, it was really stunning."

The old cesspool was replaced by an environmentally sensitive, high-tech septic system and leaching field that is designed to prevent nitrogen runoff into the harbor. Worden says after the waste water has been through the state-of-the-art system, the water is supposedly clean enough to drink—though he's in no hurry to test it.

When it came to décor, Worden called in a friend and expert in green design. HGTV's Linda Woodrum selected either antique or reclaimed furniture and used all organic fabrics. The paint is milk-based and

A great room is the central gathering space. Bedrooms shoot off that for privacy. There is no TV in the house, but it is set up for wireless Internet. Cell-phone reception is good. The great room is stocked with toys and games for good old-fashioned fun. The outdoor fireplace and patio are well-protected and well-used.



the floors are mostly mahogany. As with the exterior, all the new wood on the inside came from companies that practice responsible forestry. The result is a simple yet luxurious design. "If you walked in, you would not know you're out on the island," says Shalley. "It's equipped as well as an elegant home on the mainland. You're not sacrificing commodities, but we've built it in a very eco-sensitive way."

One of designer Woodrum's innovations was a numbering system on all the towels and cloth napkins in the house. Visitors are assigned a number that is embroidered on all their linens. They keep track of their towels during their stay and it helps reduce the energy and water used in laundering. All the cleaning materials and soaps are also eco-friendly. Even the mahogany dining table is recyclable in a sense. During its off hours, it converts into a regulation-size ping-pong table, with inlaid wood as the boundary lines for the game.

The goal in creating this green oasis on Esther's

All three bedrooms have an outdoor shower. The master bedroom has a full indoor bathroom. Bedding, towels, and other linens are made from organic materials. Towels are numbered to encourage continued use before washing. Dual flush toilets and faucets have volume controls to reduce water usage.





Island, says Worden, is to walk lightly on the land. A wood chipper was used during construction to reduce green waste, and the resultant mulch was spread around the property to fortify the native, drought-tolerant plantings.

One wouldn't be considered too skeptical or cynical for raising an eyebrow at a builder of massive vacation resorts who also seems hell bent on preserving the environment and practicing sustainable living. But Worden doesn't see the two as incompatible. "Consumers want it," he says. "Permitters demand it, and it can save us money."

Three reasons for building green that make sense and can save a bundle. ■

All appliances in the home meet Energy Star requirements. The sunsets are totally natural.

