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GREEN WITH A TWIST

A pioneering, energy-efficient home
enters its third decade in style

WRITTEN BY BESS HOCHSTEIN
PHOTOGRAPHY BY GREGORY CHERIN

FROM THE DIRT ROAD LEADING TO IT, the little house on the edge of a rolling field looks like the most traditional of Capes. Once inside, the impression is dispelled by the anything-but-conventional angles and open floor plan. The interior of the Lanesborough, Massachusetts, home of Tom and Stephanie Hoadley is modern, minimal, and airy, with unexpectedly high ceilings and décor that departs from the New England vernacular. The central stairway hooks off to the side, then twists. Neutral colors form an ideal backdrop for contemporary artwork: paintings, and pottery by Tom and other artists, many of whom are represented at the Hoadley Gallery, which Stephanie owns, in Lenox, Massachusetts.



A modern Cape Cod cottage with thick, super-insulated walls and a non-traditional floor plan celebrates twenty years of being green.

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An artful arrangement of objects, lit by skylights, brings strength and serenity to the living room.

The house holds other, less visible, surprises. It was built to be extremely energy-efficient, with passive solar design, thicker-than-standard super-insulated walls, radiant heat panels in the ceilings, an ultra-tight vapor barrier, and an air-exchange system that keeps the atmosphere fresh and healthy.

Sitting in his sun-filled living room, Tom recalls that the gasoline crisis of the 1970s had

a profound impact on his plans to build a new home. "I was becoming more aware of solar design," he recalls, noting that the Hoadleys had installed passive-solar panels on their previous house in Pittsfield with a grant from the Center for Ecological Technology (CET; www.cetonline.org), a Western Massachusetts-based nonprofit organization that promotes practical, affordable green solutions. This

"I started out with a general floor plan that I cut out of a magazine, and changed it, and changed it, and changed it, and ended up with something that I liked."



experience increased their commitment to incorporate energy-efficient elements into their home. However, says Tom, "With our budget, I wanted to be as smart as possible."

After Tom researched cost-efficient, energy-saving technologies, the Hoadleys purchased eight acres in bucolic Lanesborough. To situate the well, Tom chose a low-cost, low-tech method, hiring a professional dowser. "He was a real old-timer and quite a character," recalls Tom. "He did his magic and found the spot." They put in the well, and the water gushed at a rate of a hundred gallons per minute.

To save money, the artist decided to serve as his own architect and general contractor, consulting books and magazines for ideas and inspiration, and drawing on his past interest in becoming an architect. "I started out with a general floor plan that I cut out of a magazine, and changed it, and changed it, and changed it, and ended up with something that I liked," he recounts. When it came to drawing elevations, he realized he needed professional help.

For that, he enlisted Stockbridge, Massachusetts, architect Pamela Sandler. "I was hired in some ways as just a drafts person," she says. Sandler admired the Hoadleys' mindset. "They're children of the sixties," she says. "They care about the environment. Plus, I was fascinated

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With their large windows, the south-facing living room and west-facing music room share the light (top). From the outside, (above) the living room windows present a starkly simple geometry.

by Tom. I loved his work. And he's a total intellectual—he's always interested in what's new."

Their working relationship was relatively informal. "I basically gave her all my drawings and my scrapbook of magazine clippings, and she made it a whole lot better," Tom recounts. "She did some interesting design details, I changed her ideas, and we went back and forth like that."

"It wasn't your traditional architect/client relationship," notes Sandler. "It was more of a collaboration."

Excited to work on her first solo private residence, she coaxed Tom into rethinking the interior. "His idea was very conventional," she explains. "Everything was ninety degrees. I convinced him if on the inside he turned it at an angle, it would be much more interesting, and it would feel bigger than it is." She was also adamant that the fenestration echo the building's geometry. "I insisted on square windows. The house was a cube; the windows should be squares. Everything is very simple." Tom heeded her advice: "We found windows that were as close to square as possible and I spent a lot of time situating them."

Like most architects at that time, Sandler had never worked on an energy-efficient project. "It was not called 'green building' back then," she recalls. "I did not hear the word 'green' until about ten years ago." While she addressed aesthetics and drafting, Tom worked out the energy efficient-

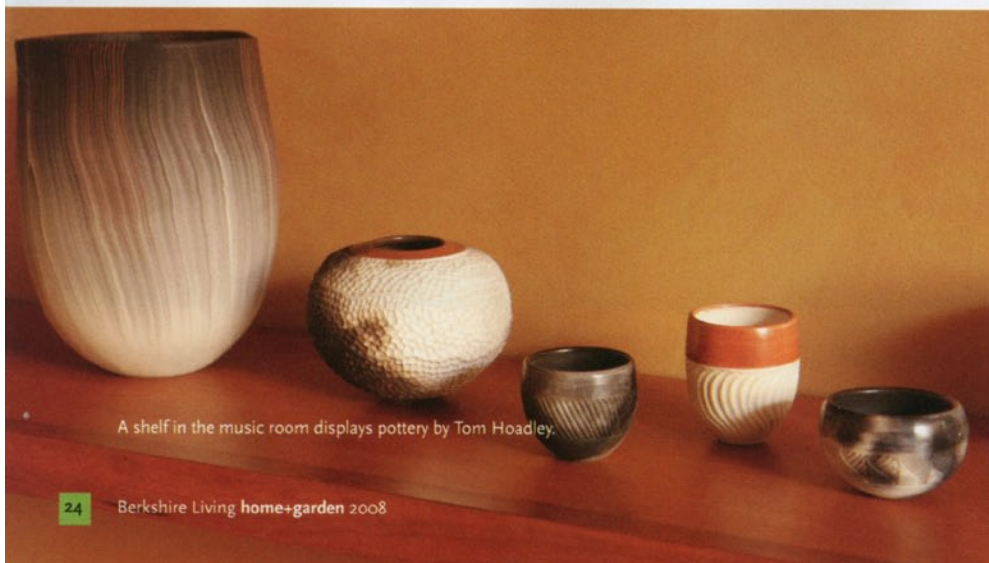
cies. "I chose super-insulation," says Tom. "Instead of two-by-fours we used two-by-sixes." The extra space allowed for more insulation, including fiberglass; two-inch-thick, foil-faced rigid foam board; and a two-inch air channel behind the sheetrock. Similarly, the foundation and roof are thicker than standard, with more insulation. Thus the R-value of the walls is about twice that of standard construction.

Creating a tight seal goes hand-in-hand with super-insulation. "Being air-tight is a major part of it," explains Tom. "It needs a vapor barrier that is continuous." Tom used sturdy polyethelene sheets, caulked and sealed to the inside foil of the foam boards. The tight seal required an effective ventilating system. "I chose an air-to-air heat exchanger, which basically brings in fresh, cool air, but passes it in close proximity to warm stale air going out," he says. "It's the most efficient way of bringing fresh air into the home."

Counter to conventional thinking, Tom chose an electric heating system: ceiling-mounted radiant heat panels. "Electric heat is usually more expensive," Tom notes. He adds that "a super-insulated house needs less heat than a traditional home" and a furnace would have been overkill. The radiant heat is energy- and cost-efficient, warming objects rather than the air. "It radiates the heat in infrared waves and heats whatever it hits," explains Tom. Supplemental heat comes from four unobtrusive cove heating units, mounted on the walls close to the ceiling, which "shine" radiant heat down.

After Tom studied these systems, he turned to CET for a referral to a simpatico builder, and found John Pollock of Lebanon Springs, New York (now retired). They broke ground in spring 1986, focusing first on what most people build last. "I built a traditional two-car garage," says Tom. "Half of it became my studio. I was able to move my pottery operation here so I could be on site every day." The family moved into the house that November, living through the carpeting, painting, and trim carpentry.

The structure's design and placement are integral to its energy-efficiency. "The most efficient space to heat is a cube," explains Tom. "The shape of the house is as close to being a cube as possible." Inside, however, the central living-room area flows into the kitchen and dining area on one side and a music room on the other. The master bedroom and the stairway jut into the open space at angles. Varying ceiling heights and paint treatments demarcate spaces; a soaring cathedral ceiling with two narrow skylights accents the living-room area. Overlooking it, a glassed-in balcony on the second-floor landing between the two bedrooms gains light and warmth from the skylights, enhancing visual appeal while maintaining privacy. To maximize solar gain,



A shelf in the music room displays pottery by Tom Hoadley.

Tom Hoadley recalls that the gasoline crisis of the 1970s had a profound impact on his plans for building his home.

the south-facing living room boasts four large windows with a sweeping view of surrounding fields and trees. The property's slight slope puts the land on the same visual plane as the principal rooms, expanding the interior's spacious feeling and relating it to the landscape. A roof overhang prevents sun from shining in the windows in summer, keeping the interior cool, while the low winter sun, penetrating beneath the overhang, contributes heat. The minimal number of north-facing windows helps prevent heat loss in winter.

The Hoadleys rely on another old-fashioned method to regulate temperature. "In the heat of the summer, we open up all the windows at night and the house cools down," explains Tom. "In the morning, we close all the windows and pull the shades. My father taught me that when I was growing up." Double-paned, insulated windows with Duet insulated shades augment the impact. Set into thick walls without frames, the windows have deep ledges, perfect for displaying pottery and other decorative objects.



Central to the home's cost effective energy efficiency is its modest size: 2,400 square feet. The open plan gives very little over to walls; when company comes, the master bath serves as a powder room, thanks to a pocket door that closes off the shower area.

Tom says he regrets one omission from his original plan: "I liked the idea of a fireplace with built-in benches, but building a fireplace is a big expense, plus you're dealing with lots of air going out the chimney." The trade-off is green: the couple's average monthly electric bill is just \$300 for lighting, appliances, hot water, and heating not only the house, but also the roomy hot tub on the large, shady deck off the kitchen. The Hoadleys find warmth in their cozy music room, designed by Barbara Boughton of Great Barrington, Massachusetts. Set off from the living room by a partial wall, it has lower ceilings, earthy golden walls, cherry built-in shelving and seating, and an upright piano. And of course there are those south-facing, living-room windows. Tom describes another benefit of his design: "Sometimes, when the sun's beaming in, Stephanie and I curl up with a book and sit here, enjoying the warmth of the sunlight." **h+g**

Bess Hochstein, a contributing editor to *Berkshire Living*, covers a wide variety of feature topics, including architecture and the arts. Her regional ramblings appear in the *Berkshire Buzz* section of the *Berkshire Visitor Bureau's* website (www.berkshires.org).

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Left: Deep window sills provide display space for found objects and favorite pottery. Top: Tom Hoadley's pieces mix with work by other Berkshire artists, against an earthy neutral backdrop and new Arts and Crafts/Mission-style furnishings.

