

**PAM SANDLER**  
BUILDING GREEN

**SHOPPING WITH**  
**ECO-CONSCIENCE**

**A BRIMFIELD**  
**OF TREASURES**

# Berkshire Living

THE GOOD LIFE IN THE COUNTRY

## It's Now Easy Being Green

Strategies for a  
Sustainable Lifestyle



**THE BIFF**  
**URNS FIVE**  
*page 20*

**YOUR GUIDE**  
**TO LAWYERS**  
*page 74*

**SOLAR-POWERED**  
**SHAKERS**  
*page 12*

**BERKSHIRE ORGANICS**  
**SPECIAL DELIVERY**  
*page 34*

\$4.99 MAY 2010



berkshireliving.com

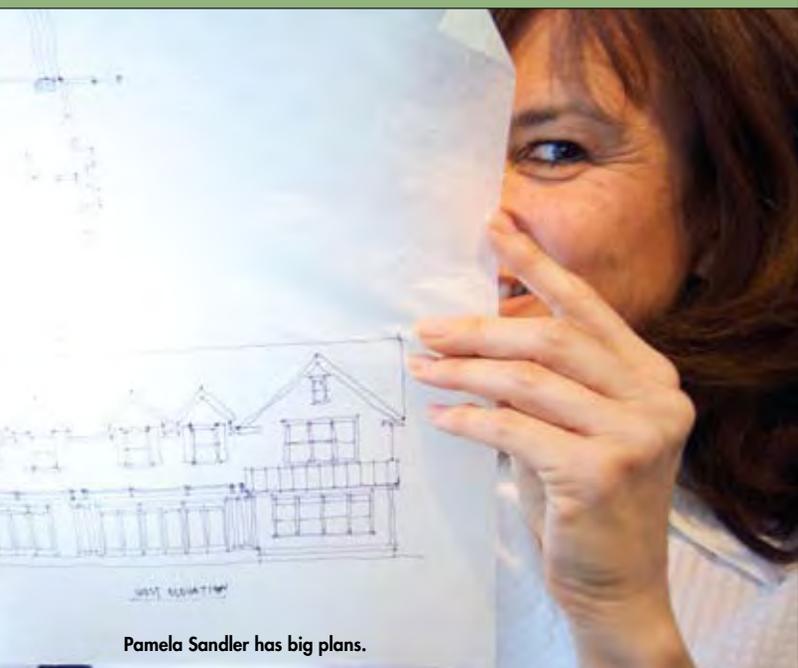
# HOME

46 design • 55 object lesson • 56 hot property

## Sandler's Lot

For one Stockbridge, Mass., architect,  
going green is nothing new

WRITTEN BY JEREMY D. GOODWIN  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY GREGORY CHERIN



Pamela Sandler has big plans.

**P**AMELA SANDLER IS DELIGHTED by a pile of old wood. Leading a tour of the 1920s-era former livery stable adjacent to the structure upon which she's set to launch a major, thoroughly green renovation, the architect notices a modest load of wooden planks stacked on the concrete floor, salvaged from the attic of the nearby building that houses her offices.

"He gave it to me!" Sandler enthuses, referring to her landlord and nearly clapping her hands in glee. "It's not much, but after we sand this down, it will make gorgeous flooring. Or we could make a cabinet or a table from it. There's something about old wood—it's got history; it's got depth. And they were going to throw this away...."

The moment sums up Sandler's professional ethos and reflects the easy joy she draws from the everyday details of her work. Yes, she is eager to find locally sourced, non-pressure-treated lumber when called for, but if some scrap can be salvaged from an attic and fashioned into something new, then so much the better.

Sandler's career displays a green consciousness that predates all the buzz. She believes green building isn't just about finding the latest non-toxic paints and installing energy-efficient climate-control systems, though these are indeed important. Sandler believes it's time to claim historic preservation and adaptive reuse as the original green technologies.

"In my mind, reusing a building is the greenest thing you can possibly do. I look at 'green' as renewal, to reuse what we've got," Sandler explains. "It's not all science and theory—some of this we've been doing forever."

Dressed casually in a maroon turtleneck and jeans, with funky, blue reading glasses perched atop her head, the pixyish Sandler is sitting in her offices above the Daily Bread Bakery on Main Street in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, on a weekday evening. The windows immediately behind her look out upon the precise view from which Norman Rockwell designed his iconic illustration *Main Street at Christmas*. She is quick to smile, to laugh, and to underline a point by pounding gently on her desk. Next to that desk are three shelves stocked with dozens of wind-up toys—from a mechanical grasshopper to "the robot area," as she playfully describes it. Though she views green building as serious business, Sandler works in an environment informed by her sense of humor and joie de vivre.

As a child, Sandler was inspired by the harmony between building and nature achieved by Frank Lloyd Wright's iconic Fallingwater, the rural Pennsylvania home built over a waterfall. As an architecture student at Tulane University in the late 1970s, Sandler was influenced by the writings of Christopher Alexander, who emphasized the need for buildings that are not only utilitarian and highly functioning, but part of, in twenty-first-century parlance, sustainable communities.

Whereas her classmates designed flashy new structures for their theses, Sandler plotted out the overhaul of an existing warehouse on the Hudson River. It wasn't the most glamorous choice, but one that made a statement about her priorities. She recalls an earlier exercise in which her class was instructed to design housing for a proposed community of 400,000. Her classmates eagerly designed "big towers," she recalls, while Sandler sketched a series of small towns. "I was really chastised for that at the time. But I always wanted to be the small-town architect."



**Back to the Drawing Board:** Even in her earlier work, Pamela Sandler utilized design elements that only now others recognize as "green." (Below) Office characters.





Emphasizing adaptive reuse and utilitarian design, Sandler anticipated some of the concerns of the green building movement. And only recently has this perspective become commercially feasible. “We’re going back to basics, and it’s about time,” says Brian G. Sutton of the Great Barrington, Massachusetts-based sustainability consultants Berkshire Green Builders.

Sutton and Sandler were among the founders of the Berkshire branch of the nonprofit U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC), one of seventy-eight chapters. With its Leadership in Engineering and Environmental Design (LEED) program, the USGBC spells out in exhaustive detail the best practices for environmentally conscious design. Sutton is consulting on Sandler’s Green at Main project, the planned transformation of a 1920s-era garage and livery tucked away off of Main Street in Stockbridge.

Sandler’s body of work is dotted with design features that today would be recognized as green techniques, but at the time simply seemed like good ideas. She believes in building on a smaller footprint and utilizing every available inch—thus, cabinets are placed under staircases and storage spaces tucked within benches. For a residence in Lanesborough, Massachusetts, in the early 1980s, she placed window overhangs to maximize indoor exposure to the low-hanging winter sun, while tempering solar gain in the summer.

For her 2003 renovation of the one-time granary building at 47 Railroad Street in Great Barrington (home, coincidentally, to the first *Berkshire Living* headquarters), Sandler had all the floorboards removed; the unnecessarily thick ones were sliced in half and re-milled, with the extra wood utilized elsewhere in the building. “Everything we could keep, we kept,” she recalls. New additions included energy-efficient windows for the storefront. Renovation of

the historic Courier Building right around the corner featured a high-efficiency boiler.

That same year, Sandler teamed with developer Margaret Brownell to construct a residence on Baldwin Hill in South Egremont, Massachusetts, with green considerations conscientiously at the forefront. The first key task was to decide where to site the building on the available parcel of land. The goals were to move as little earth and to cut the fewest number of trees as possible, while maximizing the home's southern exposure to the sun and shielding it from north winds.

This proved problematic, however; given the layout of the neighborhood, too many windows on the south side would have impacted privacy. Instead, the team (which included



**The House that Pam Built:** Cutting down as few trees as possible was a key consideration for the siting of this South Egremont, Mass., house.



contractor Bohlen-Reis) sacrificed some potential solar gain and went to work sourcing as many green building products as possible. By today's standards, it may as well have been the Dark Ages: they encountered challenge after challenge in their attempts to find materials that didn't off-gas hazardous chemicals. Among the priorities were locating plywood, paints, finishes, construction ad-

*"I always wanted to be the small-town architect."*

hesive, and carpeting that didn't contain formaldehyde-based glues and other toxins.

"New products were starting to come out, and I was going on all these wild goose chases to find out how clean or not-clean they were," says green builder Adam Medina, who did much of the product sourcing for the Egremont project and had great troubles



**Practicing What She Preaches:** Architect Pamela Sandler standing in the former gas station in Stockbridge, Mass., she plans on reusing for her new office space.

finding plywood that didn't off-gas. The tribulations of Sandler and crew on their quest for "non-tox" building supplies indicated that they were on the leading edge of what was commercially viable at the time. The landscape has changed dramatically in just a few years; Medina reports that nowadays he can choose from about twenty kinds of non-toxic plywood.

Invigorated by this increased exposure to green building techniques, Sandler spent several years learning more about the emerging possibilities. By 2009, after absorbing as much information as possible through personal investigation, Sandler felt the need to engage in a systematic study of the state-of-the-art green building. So she passed the LEED certification exam, an accreditation that seals one's status as an expert in the field.

LEED offers benchmarks in nine categories encompassing the entirety of any building project, from water efficiency and indoor air quality to a site's proximity to community resources. LEED designation is available for new construction or work on existing buildings and is granted in a range from basic certification to notations for silver, gold, or platinum, depending on a number of points earned. A mere handful of projects with LEED certification exist in the Berkshires to date, including the North Adams [Mass.] Public Library and two buildings on the campus of the Hotchkiss School in Lakeville, Connecticut.

Projects in the Berkshires are not well-suited to earn LEED credits based on regional connectivity; points are available for location within walking distance of two or more bus lines, for instance. In many towns, only those buildings located in a small downtown area are poised to earn LEED points for lying within walking distance of community services such as schools and markets. However, the region's architects and builders are well-positioned to reach other benchmarks, specifically those related to regional sourcing of timber, concrete, and other basic construction supplies available within a five-hundred-mile radius.

Now Sandler is ready to fuse her freshly stoked interest in leading green building techniques with a passion that's fully informed her entire career. The Green at Main, her first LEED-certified project, focuses on the renovation of a neglected parcel with a long history, just yards from Main Street yet still possessing an air of seclusion. The centerpiece will be the makeover of the seven-thousand-square-foot erstwhile garage into offices for her practice, as well as additional space for business condominiums. Completion is slated

**Berkshire Living**  
*presents*  
**the REST of the STORY**  
**Building Green**

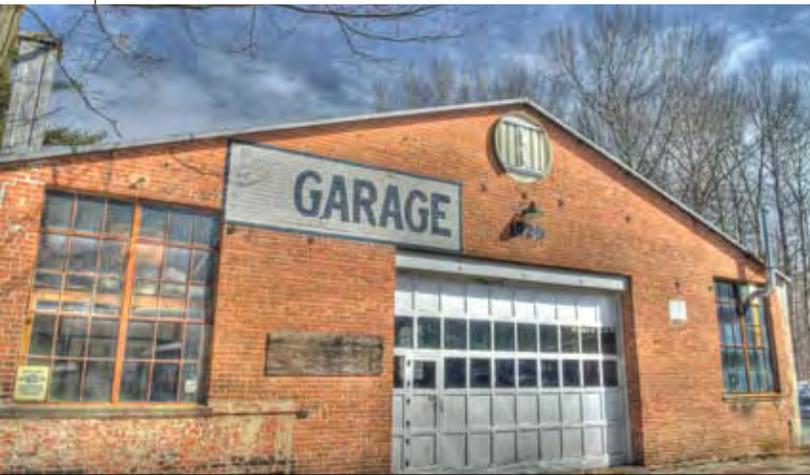
Join us on **Sunday, May 23, at 11 a.m.**, at the Triplex Cinema in Great Barrington, Mass., for a conversation on environmentally conscious building with architect **Pamela Sandler, AIA**, landscape designer **Buzz Gray**, and green developer **Jody Rael**, part of the award-winning Rest of the Story series of free public forums, moderated by *Berkshire Living* editor-in-chief **Seth Rogovoy**. For more information call us at **413.443.8200**.

*co-produced by* **TRIPLEX**  
C I N E M A  
GREAT BARRINGTON, MASSACHUSETTS

for the spring of 2011, with work on the adjacent three-thousand-square-foot livery building to follow.

Sandler anticipates earning a bulk of LEED points through her re-use of existing buildings given their location in the town center. “This project is the culmination of everything I’ve learned about green building,” she says. “When do you see a parcel like this right in the middle of town? It’s a hidden jewel. We get to bring back life into a parcel that was dead.”

She’s keeping the building’s walls and roofs, adding a stress-skin roof to maximize insulation. Among the regionally sourced, sustainable materials are efficient lighting and plumbing fixtures and high-efficiency furnaces. Sandler has designed an open-floor plan to maximize the flow of natural light, entering through large, energy-efficient wall



**Best Laid Plans:** The proposed Green at Main is a makeover of a garage space into offices for Sandler and additional business condominiums.

panels and ceiling cupolas. Office workstations will be positioned to receive the most natural light, with bathrooms, storage spaces, and other low-traffic areas located further from the windows. Sandler's plan calls for a driveway made from permeable asphalt and pavement and an anterior pocket park with locally sourced vegetation and benches for public use.

She's particularly delighted by the grass roof set to be installed on the livery as a means of insulation and moisture absorption.

"It would be great if a holistic doctor wanted to buy the space and plant an herb garden up there," Sandler says with a beaming smile, gesturing to the spot. "And you'll be able to touch the roof as you walk by!"

Sure, it's a conspicuously green technology. But a garden on the roof is certainly a creative and efficient reuse of existing space—and it suits Sandler's back-to-basics approach quite well. **BL**

*Jeremy D. Goodwin has written about performance poetry and pink sea salt for Berkshire Living and BBQ: Berkshire Business Quarterly. He would like someone to hire him to cover the 2011 Telluride Bluegrass Festival. He's just sayin'.*

**THE GOODS**

**Pamela Sandler, AIA**  
31 Main St.  
Stockbridge, Mass.  
413.298.4227  
www.sandleraia.com

**Berkshire Green Builders**  
80 Brush Hill Rd.  
Great Barrington, Mass.  
413.528.5788  
www.berkshiregreenbuilders.com



**Office Space:** The 2003 renovation of this Great Barrington, Mass., building included removing all the floorboards and using the extra wood elsewhere in the building.

