

# DECOR MAINE

ARCHITECTURE ART DESIGN EXPERIENCE FOOD SUSTAINABILITY

THREE WOMEN  
BUILD A NEW KIND  
OF COMMUNITY  
IN CUMBERLAND

## The ECO ISSUE

March 2020

HOME IN MAINE:  
AN ACTOR COUPLE  
SETS THE SCENE

THINK GLOBALLY,  
EAT (REALLY, REALLY)  
LOCALLY

**PLUS**  
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GUIDE:**

Shops, Salons, and  
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“Patrice is an eager scavenger. Among her Craigslist finds: her property’s yurt, where she lived for six months when her home was being built, and the bricks from a former mill that line her mudroom’s floor. Old beams sourced from defunct mills, barns, a bank, and even a Bowdoin frat house are used amply throughout the home for decorative beams, accent walls, staircase treads, and even the kitchen stove’s hood.”

—DEBRA SPARK, "SOULFUL SOLAR," PAGE 38

#### On the Cover

Salvaged barn walls, old beams, antique doors, and even a repurposed picture frame for a bathroom mirror are all part of the "upcycling" that makes this solar home in Cumberland distinctive and eco-conscious.

**PHOTOGRAPHER:**  
Michael D. Wilson



A custom barn door made of salvaged wood separates the master bedroom and bath. The rugs are from old Maine farmhouses.

photos by  
MICHAEL D. WILSON

# SOULFUL SOLAR

A trio of women partner to create beautiful, self-sufficient homes for themselves and others

BY DEBRA SPARK



Remnants were upcycled for this corner of the mudroom, whose walls are paned with an old mill's metal windows. These give a direct view of a pantry made of antique screen doors to which new copper screens have been added.





With the same tight package, three bedrooms, and 2.5 baths as other units in the community, Patrice Cappelletti's house was customized with timber frame detailing for a first-floor master bedroom and a living room that rises via a staircase made with repurposed stairway newels to an open loft space. The woodstove is made of soapstone.





**above** "I'm in awe of old things," says homeowner and builder Patrice Cappelletti. This includes her collection of vintage hat stands, which she found in Hallowell, and put on an old shelf to which she added hooks for her mudroom. **right** Almost all the lighting in the house is from Hallowell's Brass and Friends Antiques, including many exterior lanterns that have been refurbished and repurposed for interior use.



**MY OWN BAD CASE OF CLIMATE GRIEF**, the new term for those angst-ing about the fate of the planet, prompted me to action last fall. Out with my behemoth oil tank and in with heat pumps and solar panels. At the time, a neighbor said he wished he could somehow tap into my solar array—I've got the south-facing orientation that he doesn't—and the comment made me fantasize about the possibilities. What if there were some communal project that could make use of the relative abundance of land in my semirural neighborhood? What if we could help each other go green? Little did I know that three miles away in Cumberland, a group of women were having the same thought ... and putting that thought into action in the form of "Solar Way," a 25-acre property with five net-zero homes with shared walking trails, conservation land, and an organic garden.

Architect Emily Mottram and business partner Patrice Cappelletti conceived of Solar Way as a prototype community of "soulful, eco-friendly houses," as the two put it. Patrice initially bought land in Cumberland in 2014, having relo-

cated from the Sunday River area, where she owned and operated the Matterhorn Ski Bar and made initial forays into building. A friend introduced her to Emily, who specializes in high-performance homes in cold environments, and the two built an initial home on the land for Patrice and her two children. That house—which had monthly utility bills of \$11—was eventually sold, and Patrice now lives in the subdivision's third home. The fourth home belongs to Kerry Lewis, a landscape architect, who recently rounded out the collaborative with Emily and Patrice.

With the building partners quite literally living and working on-site—Emily and Kerry share an office above Kerry's garage—prospective clients can easily tour three of the existing homes for a sense of what the team can provide at a different location. The houses are all south-facing, and all have three bedrooms, 2.5 baths, ductless heat pumps, and solar panels. To keep the envelope supertight, the walls have dense-packed cellulose insulation and the attics have blown-in cellulose. For homeowners looking to further





The house is nicknamed the Slate Farmhouse, in part because it was designed around the oversized black slate sink that dominates the kitchen and occasions the colors of the darker bottom cabinetry as well as the choice of soapstone for the counters. Lighter cabinetry and open shelves prevent the east-facing wall of the house from reading as too dark.



reduce their carbon footprint in the future, two of the houses can accommodate additional solar panels for an electric car that doesn't tap the grid.

Patrice says she designs houses around a single item. Solar Way's first house was conceived around a beloved Angela Adams rug, and her current home was designed around an oversized slate farmhouse sink. But Emily also notes the homes have been customized according to each homeowner's lifestyle. "Patrice is an entertainer. She owned a restaurant. There's always a spread of something to eat at her house," says Emily. As such, the first house in the community was built as a gathering space. Kerry's house was designed to accommodate her collection of inherited antique furniture, need for an in-home office, and desire for a second-floor apartment for her parents, who summer with her.

As for the home that Patrice currently lives in: It consists of a single great room with a master suite on the first floor and a loft, which overlooks the vaulted-ceiling living room, with

additional bedrooms on the second. The design incorporates the modernity of a solar home, the heartiness of timber frame detailing, and the élan of a space warmed with eclectically salvaged items. It's not just new technology that makes the homes savvy but also the upcycling that comes with creative reuse of materials.

Patrice is an eager scavenger. Among her Craigslist finds: her property's yurt, where she lived for six months when her home was being built, and the bricks from a former mill that line her mudroom's floor. Old wood and beams sourced from defunct mills, barns, a bank, and even a Bowdoin frat house are used amply throughout the home for decorative beams, collar ties, accent walls, ceiling detailing, staircase treads, door frames, and even the kitchen stove's hood. An old blackboard and antique corbels serve as a backsplash wall for the living room's woodstove. Metal mill windows separate the mudroom from the kitchen, screened-porch doors faced with new copper screening form pantry doors, and vintage lighting is used throughout the interior. Shoe racks from a



*left* Heart-shaped stones found on Peak's Island interrupt the natural slate mosaic tile from Home Depot that is used for the master bath shower. *below* "Why are men always building when women are the ones who nest and fill homes with warmth?" asks Patrice, who takes pride in her all-female partnership with architect Emily Mottram and landscape architect Kerry Lewis. Here, beloved cat Fatty nestles into a pillow made from an old bedroom throw and a Cuddledown duvet.





The master bedroom's accent wall, collar tie, and accent ceiling are made from salvaged wood.





SOULFUL



Modeled on a bathroom that Patrice saw on Goop.com, the vanity combines a piece of marble (cut by K & D Countertops in Windham) with a custom cabinet handmade by finish carpenter Mark Lynch of Vintage Maine Carpentry. Mark is also responsible for the fabricated hood in the kitchen, the pantry doors, and the wood detailing throughout the house. The vintage linen and wood frame is from a Hallowell antiques shop, and Patrice had a mirror cut to fit it.

*opposite page, bottom right*  
The powder room with its chalkboard wall, wainscoting, and Patrice's collection of aprons.





**above** A view of the master bedroom and its antique art wall, an assemblage with the first item Patrice ever bought when she came to Maine—the rose picture, then priced one dollar—as well as antlers from her grandfather, an old frame, needlepoint, and antique handbags. The central bed pillow is covered in an antique drape. The burlap curtain to the right is the closet door. The hand-painted bureau is pine.

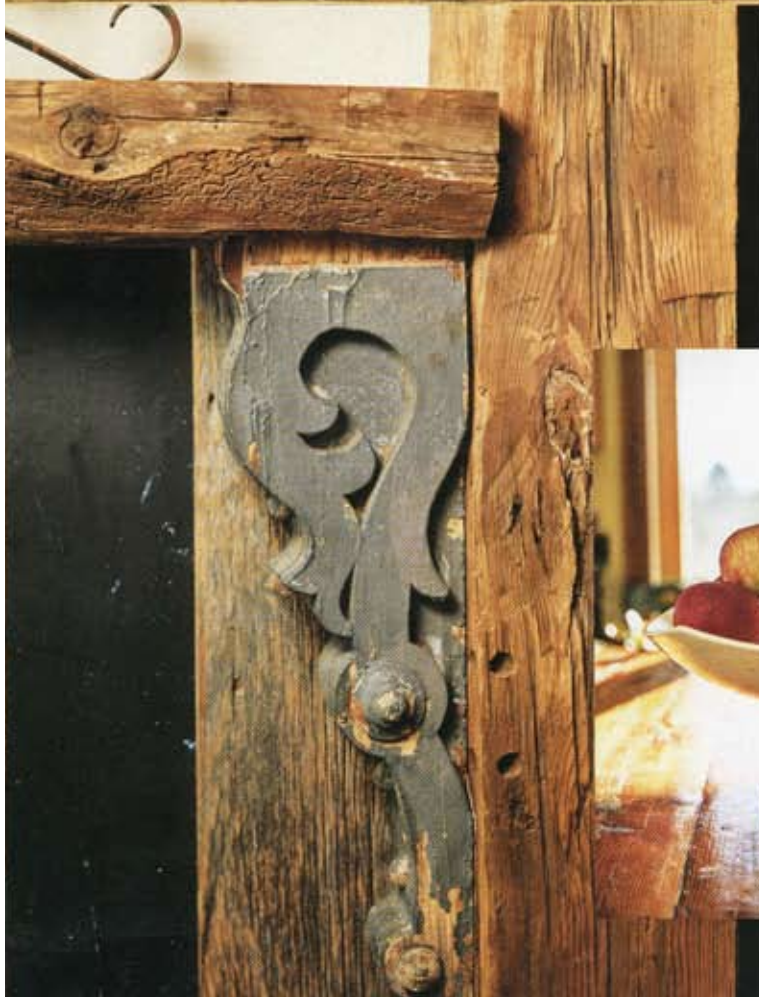
historic shoe factory organize items in the mudroom. The master bath shower tile includes heart-shaped rocks collected on Peaks Island.

People can (and have) toured Solar Way's homes with an eye to building a version of the existing homes on individual lots, but the collaborative's long-term goal isn't too far off from what my neighbor imagined when he saw the solar array in my yard: a neighborhood that co-owns technology as well as space. "Maybe," says Emily, fast-forwarding to where she hopes to be by the end of 2020, "a 10-lot community with shared solar panels and smaller homes."

"We want to bring back the visit," Patrice says of the conviviality that is also built into the Solar Way community—winter means a solstice bonfire; this summer, perhaps some collectively owned chickens. A harkening back to the way, perhaps, things used to be along with a move forward to where they need to go next. ■







**above** An old French pine hutch in the kitchen has antique plates and steins, much of it inherited from family. **far left** A detail from the area behind the woodstove, which features a chalkboard from a former schoolhouse and a corbel taken from the exterior of a former home. **left** Apples from Sweetser's, the local apple farm, catch the sun in a vintage pedestal on a custom farmhouse table. **opposite page** A tableau with a piece of ceiling tile, and a portrait of Patrice's mother, drawn in Montmartre in Paris in the 1960s, next to a portrait of Patrice, drawn in Paris in the 1980s.



SOULFUL SOLAR







Visible here—the exterior roof with some of the 20 solar panels that help make this a net-zero house. Not visible—the underside of the porch ceiling, which is finished with galvanized metal roofing. The columns are eight-by-eight-inch hemlock timbers from a local mill.