

# Port City LIFE

Celebrating Maine Life

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Photograph by JAMES R. SALOMON



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**DESIGN**



*Lots of natural light and a spacious feel are trademarks of this 1500-square-foot Falmouth home.*

see what it was like to live in. "I loved it," she confides.

The beauty of its setting, décor, and design turns on its head any notions of what a prefabricated house should look like. The cathedral ceiling in the living/kitchen area, pitched at a 45-degree angle, adds a spacious feel. The walls are white in this open area; visible wooden collar ties add warmth and yoke the building together.

The fireplace is one you might find in any prefab, but it is a stunning focal point. South-facing floor-to-ceiling windows frame the woods of Wilson's backyard, a 17-acre preserve owned by the town of Falmouth.



## House One: Where Economy and Beauty Meet

By NANCY HEISER

Photography by JAMES R. SALOMON

The design challenge: take a long, narrow footprint the size of a single wide trailer home—16 x 72 to be exact—and create a beautiful and affordable house with lots of light and a feeling

of space. Do this without plastics or vinyl building materials. Design it as a prefab—a home meant to be built in a factory and erected on site in about a day's time.

"We used these plans as a given, and this was our solution," says architect Carol Wilson, who designed the house with her business partner in House One, A Maine Corporation, Susan

Ruch. The design takes the long rectangle of the mobile home and breaks it into two 16 x 32-foot boxes, slightly shifted on the site and oriented to bring in as much light as possible.

"We wanted the whole package price to be \$100,000 ... because everyone points the bony

finger at architects and accuses them of expensive homes. We set out to prove them wrong," adds Wilson.

The home was designed and built in 1994 as a prototype. But a few years later, when it came time to move, she decided to buy it from the corporation and

A wooden walkway brings the visitor from the parking area to the front door. Pass through an arbor that is covered with foliage in the warmer weather and by a sea of ferns lining the simple dooryard, and you feel as you taken one step from the natural world to the inside.



"It's pretty minimal. It's small," Wilson concedes, of the living space. The home has a master bedroom, small second bedroom, and one bath. It totals 1500 square feet, even with a room she added later. There is a crawl space, but no basement.

Cost savings in the original

house come from size and other design details, like the lack of moldings or formal landscaping. "We sheet rocked right to the window jambs," says Wilson. "There was no need to trim out the closet." The siding of the house is stained plywood. To compensate for the lack of stor-

age, a down side of many pre-fabs, the Wilson-Ruch design includes two pull-down stairs for attic access, one from the small bedroom.

Since moving in, Wilson has built a one-room addition, a study set slightly off center from the living area, mirroring the living



room's design. In here Wilson has a grand piano, bookshelves, family photos, and a desk that runs the length of the wall, housing the computer she uses for personal tasks (she works at a separate detached office, just steps away from her home).

The sleek, custom kitchen

cabinetry, a collaboration with Mark White, a Portland cabinetmaker, is new. And because Wilson sought to hide obvious kitchen appliances like the "big American refrigerator" and stove hood from view, the two compartments of the refrigerator are side by side and only as

high as the kitchen counter, blending seamlessly with the cabinets; the German designed Miele oven hood slides into a hidden slot, out of the way. The cabinets are designed without obvious hardware, adding to the smooth effect.

To decorate the bright and airy space, Wilson chose furniture that is "fifties modern." She used spinnaker cloth for window treatments in the master bedroom. And while parquet floors are part of the original design, Wilson has topped them with designer rugs by Angela Adams, because "floors are so important." The result is an efficient, clutter-free refuge of natural materials simply and creatively used, nestled in the woods of Falmouth.\*



**Beautiful doesn't have to mean big or expensive, as this home demonstrates.**

# Across the Drafting Table

## An Interview with Architect Carol Wilson

By NANCY HEISER

*In May 2005 Carol A. Wilson of Falmouth was elevated to the American Institute of Architects prestigious College of Fellows, only the fifth Mainer to be so honored and the only living Fellow in the state. (Former Maine Fellows include John Calvin Stevens and Alonzo Harriman.) She is also President of the newly-formed Portland Society of Architects. She recently talked with us about her design principles, influences, and outlook for architecture in Maine.*



### What does the title of Fellow of the American Institute of Architects mean?

It means you're representing the highest level of the institute. So, it's a big deal. There are five or six categories. The big one and the hard one is design, and that's what I got it for, which meant a lot to me. It's for a body of work I've done.

### Do people have a misguided notion of what architects do?

Not misguided. They just don't know. (And we're talking about residential architects.) Architects design only two percent of all houses, and so the profession has a certain mystique or mystery. Most people think they couldn't afford to involve an architect.

### So, more people could involve an architect in designing their homes?

Oh, yes, and they would love it. My clients have so much fun and are amazed at what goes into a house and what they'd miss without an architect.

### What's important about architecture? Why not just build a house or an office?

(Laughs.) In my opinion, ev-

erything. Every aspect of building. Whether it's the quality of the actual construction, or the quality of the space. A lot of people do that [build without much thought to design], and we all see it. But if it's well done, it sticks around for a while. That's the thing that's most important. It's basically out on the street for all to see, and we all participate in it.

### What are your design principles as an architect?

The thing that drives my design most is where I live and what I'm building. It has to do with being in Maine—climate, solar patterns, wind patterns. Really, climate and light. Culture is a big part of it, too. And building technology. We're not building with the same materials we were 100 years ago. So: place, culture, and building technology.

### Is there a trend towards manufactured housing design, like House One, the house you co-designed and now live in?

Oh, huge. Unfortunately, we were in the market before the trend. Since 2000, there's been a real explosion. We were a little

bit before the time. The company that manufactured House One went out of business. I could sell one a week if it weren't.

### What are other trends in residential architecture? What about "green" design?

"Green" is a good word. Architecture, perhaps, will never be sustainable. Architecture probably uses more raw materials than anything else. Therefore, if we're going to be building, we should be doing it well, making it as efficient as we can. Not only energy efficient, but with an efficiency of materials. Thinking about where they come from and where they'll go.

Part of that, also, is thinking about what we really need. Should we be building McMansions, or houses that require so much of our resources? I think people will be asking that question more as oil prices go higher. Someone's got to heed it.

Building well is building something that's attuned to the place where it's built, built with an economy of means and resources, requiring minimal sustenance, and is durable. It's also got to be responsive to the people who live in it. Light, for instance, is so important here in Maine.

### Tell us a little about the Portland Society of Architects.

I feel most optimistic about the community of architects in Portland. We now have not only breadth, but depth. Our mission statement: "To advocate for design excellence in the Greater Portland built environment while promoting fellowship in the local design community." We incorporated in the beginning of 2006.

### What was the motivation for the organization's creation?

The architects want to be involved in [the city's] design standards and haven't been so far, but we feel it's the greatest service we can do for our community. We feel it could improve the quality of the built environment in Portland. We look at it as giving back. They [the Portland peninsula's current design standards] are restrictive in what they allow and to the creative process of architecture. We need to rethink progress, rethink urban design, and come up with solutions. The design standards are definitely hampering innovation. I recently said to a client, "You can't do that in Portland." So they pulled out of Portland, and that's huge. The mayor [James Cohen] has a platform to boost the creative economy and promote sustainability, and our mission is to support that. We hope to see it come to life. It's time for us to go to bat for what we believe in. The architects in Portland are totally willing to do that.

### What gives you the most satisfaction, either in your professional life or apart from it?

There is no apart from it. That's the wonderful way I live and work. It's totally integrated. I'm just one of the lucky people who do what I love and love what I do.

### What else do you do really well that might surprise people?

I travel by myself a lot. I circumnavigated New Zealand by myself for two months on my motorcycle, stopping to fly fish along the way. \*