

HOME & GARDEN

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Two loves, ONE VISION

Architect Carol Wilson blends her passions for contemporary design and the Maine landscape to create structures with a sense of place in the here and now.

By **BOB KEYES**

Staff Writer

FALMOUTH — A client once told Carol Wilson, "You've only got so many projects in your life. Pick them wisely."

It's some of the best advice Wilson ever received.

Wilson, a Falmouth architect, designs only a handful of buildings each year, selecting projects that fire her creativity.

Lately, the projects that inspire her the most are those that combine her love of contemporary design with her love of the Maine landscape.

Wilson reveres the state's natural character, and designs buildings — private homes, offices, artist studios — that enhance elements of the environment. As she mulls her design options, she considers the site's natural setting, the flora, fauna and other aspects of place.

Her goal is to make a home blend in with the neighborhood of existing homes and to fit its natural setting.

"A lot of people call my work modern, but to me, I think the 'M' should stand for Maine," she says. "I do Maine-appropriate architecture in the year 2005."

MOVING FORWARD WITH DESIGN

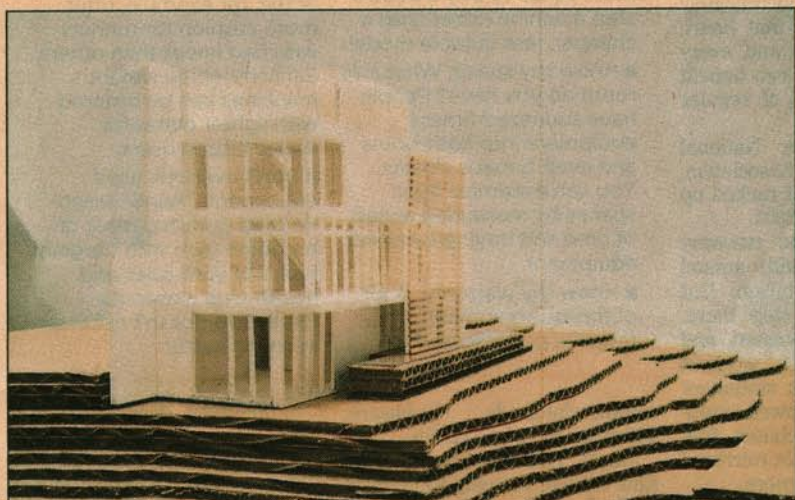
Wilson was feted with a gathering of her peers last week at the Portland Museum of Art in recognition of her elevation to the College of Fellows of the American Institute of Architects. She likely will turn heads again with her latest project.

Working with Erik and Caitlin MUSHIAL of Portland, she has designed a modern home in the historic West End that will look unlike anything else in the neighborhood.

Wilson designed a sleek building that's four stories tall and packed with south-facing windows, affording the MUSHIALS maximum sunlight and stunning views of Portland Harbor.

And yet, the house will fit in nicely with the century-old structures in the neighborhood.

Overlooking the Casco Bay Bridge, narrow, hilly Clark Street is lined with wooden and brick buildings that reach skyward. The MUSHIALS' home will do the same. It won't be quite as tall as other homes in the neighborhood, but its exterior will be constructed with neutral



THE CLARK STREET PROJECT

CAROL A. WILSON is working with Portland couple Erik and Caitlin MUSHIAL on a contemporary home that will be built on lower Clark Street, near the Casco Bay Bridge.

IN THE WEST END neighborhood of 100-year-old homes, the MUSHIALS' new house will stand out with its sleek, modern design.

THE SOUTH-FACING wall will be mostly glass and gray cement board, to maximize the warmth of the sun.

THE HOUSE will be tall and narrow — just 18 feet wide but four stories tall.

gray cement board, and its primary visual aspect will be glass.

Despite its height, the Mushials' house actually is very small. With just two bedrooms and a top-floor studio, it's a mere 18 feet wide.

"The house relates to the site so well, all my initial concerns about how it would fit in with the neighborhood and how it would be accepted by the neighbors have waned," said Caitlin Mushial, 41.

"This house won't stand out for anything ornate, but rather for its clean composition, expansive glass and its use of alternative materials."

The couple's goal was to build something environmentally smart and unique; they also wanted to preserve as much of the roughly 60-by-80-foot lot as they could.

"We could have put a stout little house in there, but we'd lose a lot of the lot," said Erik Mushial, who sells backpacking and rock-climbing equipment. "The site dictated a vertical house. In doing this, the small footprint of the house reserved two-thirds of the lot as green space."

The Mushials love their West End neighborhood and respect the traditional homes. They just wanted something modern.

"Why not move forward?" asked Caitlin Mushial. "Why would we want to imitate the past or mimic John Calvin Stevens? Wouldn't he want us to move forward?"

Said Wilson of the Clark Street project: "The Portland house should be looked at not as different, but as a solution of 2005 to the problems of building and housing and our ability to seek new livable solutions."

NATURAL LIGHT, SENSE OF PLACE

In all its varied meanings, place is critical to architecture, Wilson said.

That is especially true in Maine, which she says is one of the last places where the word "pristine" still applies.

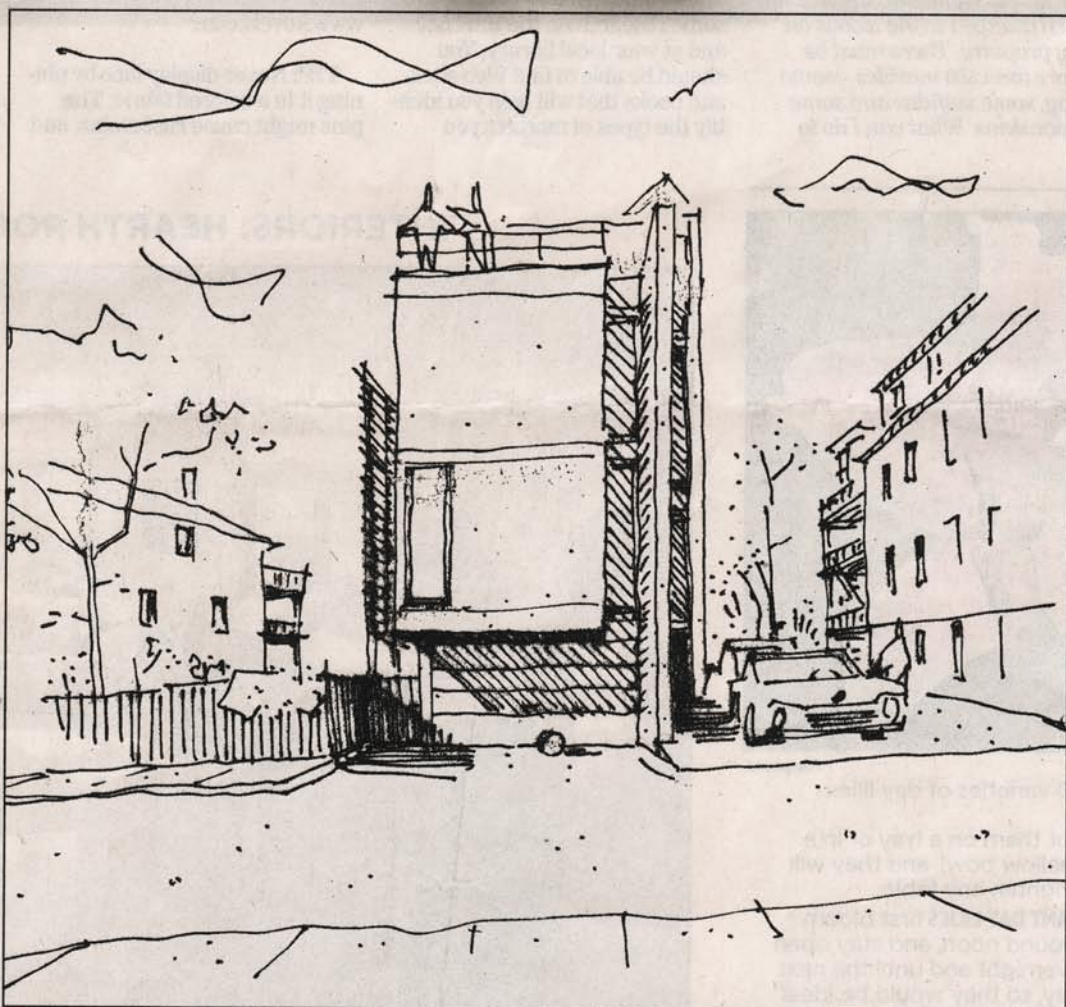
Wilson has designed several private homes on Casco Bay islands, and has taken on many public projects, as well. In association with Van Dam & Renner, she helped design the Maine Audubon Building in Falmouth.

She designed the Georgetown Historical Society, scheduled for construction in 2006, as well as the Museum of Chebeague History.

In Wilson's world, natural light and a sense of place matter most.

She delights in sharing the story of a client who phoned after he had been in his island home for a year.

He tracked the movement of the sun and the shadows it cast in the house. Sure enough, he gushed to Wilson, the shadow



Tom Hall/Carol A. Wilson architect

A rendering of the Mushial house shows how the contemporary structure will fit its environs.

CAROL A. WILSON

NOTEWORTHY: The Maine architect was honored by her peers Thursday with a reception at the Portland Museum of Art for her recent elevation to the American Institute of Architects' College of Fellows. Wilson is Maine's only living AIA fellow. There have been only four others: John Calvin Stevens, Philip Wadsworth, Alonzo Harriman and Gridley Barrows.

RESIDENCE: Falmouth.

QUOTE: "Every time I design a building, I question whether architects can really be stewards of a place. If you have an affection for or love of a place then you aspire to become a steward of this place, a guardian of something that doesn't belong to you. The beauty and landscape of the Maine Coast are demanding of anyone attempting to create an appropriate architecture."

was precisely where Wilson said it would be on the summer solstice.

A hallmark of her work is her choice of materials and attention to detail. A former woodworking student, she appreciates the work of Maine crafters and uses their skills and products whenever possible.

Another prominent aspect of Wilson's work is the expression of the structure. She leaves her buildings exposed, generally choosing not to wrap them in siding or shingles.

As she puts it, "The walls and glass form a skin to the building."

She uses insulated panels and

other sustainable products to design homes that are energy efficient.

John Gordon, president of the Maine chapter of the American Institute of Architects, said Wilson distinguished her career by respecting tradition without dwelling on it. She uses tradition as a base, and improves on it by adding contemporary flair.

"She can pull from the

vocabulary that honors and respects tradition, but she pushes it farther," Gordon said. "It seems that everything she does always fits rather nicely into the environment and makes the effort to hit the mark of Maine. There is always respect of the natural site, and her projects always look like they are at home."

The AIA award is a significant honor. From a membership of 74,000, there are fewer than 2,500 AIA fellows.

Wilson was chosen based on her career body of work, Gordon said.

In a statement, he said, "Wilson's work demonstrates her passion for creating beauty and meaning inherent in the best design of anything. The care and respect of the environment and its inhabitants, down to the finest detailing, is manifest in all her designs."

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