

Oz

Volume 25

Article 15

1-1-2003

gilbertBARKER Pod

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Recommended Citation

(2003) "gilbertBARKER Pod," *Oz*: Vol. 25. <https://doi.org/10.4148/2378-5853.1392>

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Living in the country while maintaining a connection to the pulse of modern urban life is more possible now than ever. Internet connectivity, satellite television, and inexpensive air travel have expanded the possibilities of “home.” Although the extravagances of the internet economy have perhaps tarnished enthusiasm for these technologies, our world has been profoundly impacted by them. The gilbertBARKER pod, located in rural Vermont, is a small example of what is possible as a result. It is a synthesis of sophisticated urban sensibilities and a timeless expression of caring for the environment. It is also an experiment in method for an architecture firm rooted in hands-on involvement during construction. The same tools and technologies that allow the client to live in the country while

working all over the world enabled the architect to work with the client and contractor from offices in Kansas City. Throughout the project, communication took the form of digital images, construction documents exported as JPEGs, and phone calls.

The detached home office structure is a connected getaway, a place for an international environmental dispute resolution facilitator to work at home. The methods of construction and materials used reflect the family’s desire for low-impact living. Early designs included a planted roof that was later replaced with a PVC membrane and gravel ballast due to cost concerns. The siding is a corrugated copper rain screen. The interior of the pod consists of two, partially-subterranean rooms,

cooled by cross ventilation and heated by a radiant concrete slab fed from the main house. Twelve-inch walls and roof cavities are super-insulated as is the concrete formwork. Photovoltaic panels mounted on the main house provide supplemental power.

Operable windows on the long north and south walls create favorable cross-ventilation, ensuring comfort in summer without use of air conditioning. The interior of the pod is well lit by natural light through the end-wall, polycarbonate cladding. Indirect, temperature-adjusted, fluorescent lighting provides supplemental lighting as needed. Window frames are painted bright red to accentuate the views. In winter, night comes early. The polycarbonate end walls diffuse

interior light to illuminate the pathway to the main house.

In early spring and summer, wildflowers cover the heavily wooded site. The thickened foliage creates a green backdrop for the glistening copper and polycarbonate siding. As the copper siding patinas, it begins to take on texture that helps the pod blend into the wooded site.

The gilbertBARKER pod is one of many small structures on the family’s land. The project builds upon a tradition of rural architecture rooted in common sense and frugality. It points towards a sensible way of living—using just what is needed to meet real needs and paying attention to how natural resources are consumed.





