

Harwood Stone In the News - UNDER THE BIG TOP

ANDREA STONE'S HOUSE MAY BE SHAPED LIKE A CIRCUS TENT, BUT IT'S NOT EXACTLY CANVAS AND SAWDUST

By Eric Goldscheider - BOSTON GLOBE MAGAZINE 09/17/2000

The architect dubbed it "the ark," because he thought the roof, if flipped upside down, would resemble the hull of Noah's vessel. But Andrea Stone thinks of her Northampton house as a well-insulated circus tent. It's an elongated octagon supported by a pair of three-story poles.

The house is big - about 5,500 square feet - and airy, with 25-foot ceilings in parts of the main living spaces. But it is neither breezy nor expensive to heat, because it contains 10 tons of cellulose insulation, installed at a cost of about \$25,000. In return, the local electric company gave Stone \$13,000 under a program to promote energy-efficient homes. And she has the most comfortable space she has ever lived in.

"It makes the house extremely quiet, and there are no drafts," says Stone.

"There are no parts of the house that you want to avoid in winter." When snow accumulates on the roof, it adds even more insulation. A geothermal unit uses a series of wells to capture subterranean warmth: The underground temperature is 54 degrees year-round in Western Massachusetts. In winter, the wells heat water in a closed loop, and in summer, they cool it. A forced-air climate control system operates in the house. The heat exchange system also warms water that runs through copper pipes under the kitchen floor tiles, providing radiant heat as well as household water.

Stone says the electric bill in the winter runs about \$200 a month, and there are no oil or gas bills. That compares favorably, she says, to what she used to pay for utilities in a house one-third the size.

Circus tent or inverted ark, the house is also a delight to look at.

Stone and her partner, Suzanne Harwood, who died two years ago, bought the land on which the house now sits in 1990. After a thorough search, they settled on architect Tullio Inglese of Amherst, in part because no two of his houses look alike, according to Stone. Their criteria were that the house be "open, dramatic, bright, and the kitchen should be near everything," says Stone. Inglese created the form and suggested what Stone, a psychiatrist, refers to as "the geothermal thing." Though she and Harwood hadn't heard of it before, says Stone, "there didn't seem to be any downside."

Inglese also used beams, posts, joists, and rafters made of recycled scrap wood pressed into the necessary forms. "It's a lot of glue" is what Stone knows about that. But Inglese says the long interior spans of the house made "engineered wood" the logical material, because it is two times stronger than solid wood, which in any case is hard to find in extended lengths. It also fits with Inglese's recycling philosophy. "You're basically taking a byproduct from mills," he says, "and pressing it into a beam."

The finished lower level of the house is the territory of Stone's 7-year-old son, Matthew.

(Stone is careful never to call it the basement, because, she says, she never wants to hear Matthew say "I was raised in a basement.") Dug into the hill on one side, it has south-facing windows and slabs of polystyrene laid under the concrete floor for warmth.

On the main floor, in the middle of the house, is the kitchen. On one side of it is the living room, with a majestic fireplace; on the other side is the entry and a second sitting area. The main level includes the master bedroom, with a south-facing bay window, and a screened porch. There is also a two-car garage.

What you could call the third floor is really two overhead platforms – one an exercise space and the other an office space - connected by a wide catwalk spanning the main rooms below.

The circus tent analogy speaks to more than just the shape of the house. Stone's deceased partner, a banjo-picking physician, "was known for her laugh," says Stone. When you look into the mirror in the foyer, it's hard not to smile: Carved into the wooden frame is a toothy feline with green sunglasses, an indicator of Stone and Harwood's slightly madcap taste in art.