

Inn Complete

For many travelers, the new crop of eco-conscious hotels are no place like home. And that's a good thing.

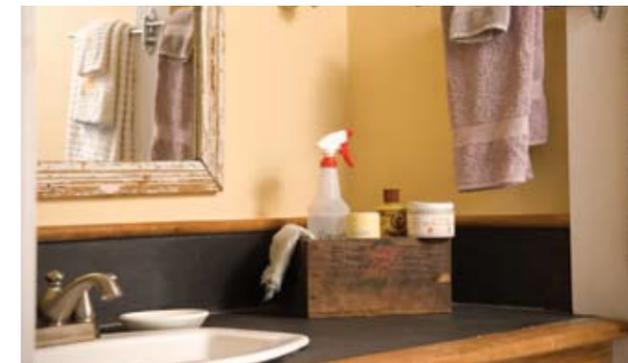
WRITTEN BY CARRIE SALDO
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JENNIFER MAY

WHEN THE OWNERS of two Berkshire residences began their pursuit of environmentally sound living spaces, they did not intend to host guests. Mary Koch, for instance, wanted to continue the environmentally conscious lifestyle her parents had instilled, one that she and her husband, Bill, have also relayed to their five children. "We try not to make a big dent on the planet," says Mary, owner of Thyme in the Country, an eco-friendly bed and breakfast in Hudson, New York.

In Adams, Massachusetts, Caryn Heilman and Nana Simopoulos wanted to live in the ecologically sound space of which they'd both long dreamed and that Heilman's health now demands. "When we were doing this we weren't thinking we would share it with anyone," says Simopoulos, co-owner of the Topia Inn. "We did



Sweeter Dreams:
Organic mattresses fitted with organic bedding practically ensure that guests rest easy at Topia Inn in Adams, Mass.



it because of the sustainability and Caryn's [chemical] sensitivities."

The Koches purchased the farmhouse in Hudson, where they have been living full-time since 2004, and reworked it into a home-business for a summer 2006 opening. Located six miles from downtown Hudson, the exterior of Thyme in the Country exudes comfort and, indeed, the interior is cozy and has a lived-in look. The three-bedroom 1880s farmhouse, which includes common sitting and living rooms, a fireplace, porches, and decks, is being updated room-by-room, so there's still plenty of evidence of life there before its eco-conversion.

The bathroom adjoining the Lavender Room is the most recent space the couple has converted, and its dual-flush toilet is its greenest element. Traditional toilets use about three gallons of water per flush (gpf). Dual-flush toilets offer two reduced gpf options, allowing as little as .8 gpf depending on the toilet model. (The user decides which flush setting is appropriate.)

Koch did about 90 percent of her shopping for the room—including sink fixtures, a shower pan, and flooring—at an architectural salvage store; the dual-flush toilet is one of the few newly purchased items. The most interesting element of the bathroom design is the repurposed chalkboards, which serve as shower walls and the bathroom sink top. In the guest rooms, beds are topped with down quilts as well as hypoallergenic and down pillows. The bedding, curtains, and rugs are made of all-natural fibers, and organic mattresses are available in some rooms. Each room is furnished with "simple antiques," items that Koch has acquired through the years as well as others that came with the home when she purchased it. Furnishing a home this way gets a big, green thumbs-up because it prevents the need for raw materials to be harvested and used to create new items.

Thyme in the Country uses solar power to fuel motion sensitive lights outside and compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs) inside. CFLs, as we've all heard by now, use about 75 percent less energy and last about ten times longer than traditional in-



Decorating Sense:

Natural fibers and "simple antiques" supply each room with rich character at Thyme in the Country bed and breakfast in Hudson, N.Y.



Mary and Bill Koch, owners of Thyme in the Country bed and breakfast, Hudson, N.Y.

candescent bulbs. Energy Star (a collaboration between the Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Department of Energy) estimates that if each American home swapped one incandescent bulb for a CFL, there'd be enough energy saved to light more than three million homes annually.

In keeping with their environmentally friendly endeavors, the Koches raise free range Leghorns and Rhode Island Reds and have an organic herb and vegetable garden on-site. The inn's outdoor swimming pool is salt-filtered, which eliminates the need to maintain it with chlorine. Additionally, Koch tries to purchase everything the inn needs from local farmers, crafters, contractors, and local business owners. She points out the living room's built-in shelves: they were created by Marty Minch, a Philmont, New York, furniture maker, with wood salvaged from an old barn on their property.

The kitchen is next in line to get the eco-touch. In the meantime, judging by the buttery aroma wafting from the oven, the room is still being put to good use. Koch removes organic croissants from the oven and serves them with homemade apricot preserves and peach ambrosia herbal tea as an impromptu snack for the guests staying at the inn this December weekend.



Visiting from Rhode Island, the Rushtons—Louise Catherine, her husband Kevin, and their eight-year-old daughter, Julia—couldn't be happier. "I love it here," says Louise Catherine, as Julia relishes her hot chocolate and snacks on a clementine at the table.

Koch settles in front of the fireplace in the living room, where *National Green Pages* magazine and *One Planet Living* are among the publications casually spread across the coffee table. "I've finally gotten to the stage where I can think beyond tomorrow morning's breakfast," says Koch.

The following weekend, during breakfast at the Topia Inn, innkeeper John Worth greets Heilman and an overnight guest with yogurt and a dish of fresh fruit. This is followed by a second course of spiced banana-tea bread and an egg soufflé with tomato and herbs. As at Thyme in the Country, the fare here is organic.

The name Topia is derived from "utopia." "Our desire was to create a place where dreams could be actualized," says Heilman. Opened in July 2007, the Pleasant Street inn is one of three spaces that comprise Topia Arts Center: a café and a theater space in downtown Adams, which they also plan to eco-convert, complete their Topia trifid, although there is now some uncertainty about when the café, which has been closed since early fall, might re-open.





THE GOODS

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 Hudson, N.Y.
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Topia Inn
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 Adams, Mass.
 413.743.9605
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There's something urban-chic about the exterior and surroundings of the Topia Inn. The Ashuwillticook Rail Trail—a former railroad line-turned-public recreational path—runs behind it, CJ's Sports Pub is next door, and downtown Adams, with its quaint eateries and retail shops, is accessible the eco-friendly way—by foot.

Topia itself offers what is likely the most inexpensive multicultural Berkshire experience. Call it Around the World In 4,000 Square Feet: guests may choose from Hawaiian, French, Iroquois, Zen, African, Greek, Peacock (reflecting the culture of India), Peace (circa-1960s America), and Moroccan motifs.

Guests are asked not to bring items that contain toxic ingredients, such as insect repellent, perfumes, and bath items. Instead, the inn provides natural, non-toxic products for use while at the inn.

Touring the rooms, it's evident that one does not have to forgo decorative elements or technology to be green. Each guest room has a flat-screen TV with satellite programming, and wireless Internet access is provided. Simopoulos said she and Heilman spent two weeks applying the earthen shades of Moab red, Acacia porcelina, and Tuscan gold earth plaster—which leaves none of the lingering fumes traditional paint does—to the walls, giving the Moroccan room a warm, aged look.

All of the inn's beds have organic mattresses fitted with organic linens. Black iron screens fixed to the wall behind the bed give the illusion of a headboard, and colored lights twinkle

through small holes in a large metal hanging lantern. A number of jewel-toned throw pillows accent the bed and a carved table and chair enhance the room's exotic, Arabian feel.

The bathroom is also stocked with organic cotton towels, as well as all-natural versions of toothpaste, deodorant, shampoo, conditioner, body wash, hairspray, shave cream, body lotion, facial cream, and bath salts. (Even the tissues, from Trader Joe's, are made of recycled paper.) And dual-flush toilets are installed in each of the inn's bathrooms.

"It was really, really hard to do this building, to get from point A to point B," says Simopoulos. Heilman estimates all of the research and work they've done was the equivalent of a part-time job. Documentation of all of the building materials and care supplies—right down to natural-fiber toothbrushes—is readily accessible in a large filing cabinet.

Among the inn's numerous green elements are cotton batt insulation, made from recycled blue jeans; paint, adhesive, sealants, draft sealers, cleaning supplies, and soaps that are low in or have no volatile organic compounds; and a biodiesel-fueled boiler.

Topia uses a four-kilowatt photovoltaic system for power. During the day, the system generates enough juice to keep the inn powered and then some—the meter actually runs backward as power is fed back to the grid. At night, when demand is higher, the inn buys the additional energy it needs.

The inn uses highly efficient light-emitting diodes, more commonly known as LED lights, estimated to last fifty thousand hours each, and low-voltage lighting instead of compact fluorescent bulbs. (CFLs, while much more efficient than traditional incandescent bulbs, contain about five milligrams of mercury, sealed in glass tubing. Therefore, CFLs can pose a health threat if broken and should be properly recycled once their usefulness has lapsed.)

It's exactly the kind of impact that the owners of Topia Inn and Thyme in the Country hope for: to inspire others to live healthier, more sustainable lives.

"People are very, very enthusiastic when they come here," says Simopoulos. "It just seems to be the time people are very aware of the environment." **BL**

Carrie Saldo is WAMC Northeast Public Radio's Berkshire Bureau Chief and a freelance journalist.



Caryn Heilman and Nana Simopoulos of Topia Inn, Adams, Mass.



Arabian Nights: Eco-friendly decor at Topia Inn in Adams, Mass., is inspired by far-off lands for an otherworldly experience.



Sort It Out

Clean up your act with these essential recycling tips

WRITTEN BY CARRIE SALDO
ILLUSTRATION BY INDIGO FLORES

REDUCE, REUSE, RECYCLE. Nearly everyone is able to rattle off that mantra, which was introduced by Japan at the 2004 G8 summit, and then championed here by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in an attempt to encourage people to lead more sustainable, less consumption-centric lifestyles. Yet the EPA estimates that though 80 percent of what Americans discard is recyclable, only 28 percent of that waste actually *is* properly recycled.

The Center for Ecological Technology (CET), with offices in Pittsfield and Northampton, Massachusetts, tries to help consumers make connections by generating and disseminating as much information as possible when it comes to living a life that's gentler on the planet. "First, target the low-hanging fruit," says Jaime Cahillane, CET's director of recycling services, meaning properly recycling paper, plastic, cans, bottles, and glass. In 2006, newspapers, followed by corrugated cardboard and tin cans, were the three most commonly recycled items, according to the EPA. However, paper is also the item most likely to be found in a landfill. (Plain paper and newspaper account for about 40 percent of the material accumulating in United States landfills.) And landfills, not surprisingly, are wastelands of inactivity in which paper, food waste, and other materials marinate, creating methane, a greenhouse gas, which is then vented into the atmosphere.

You should know....

Massachusetts law prohibits a number of items from being tossed in the trash:

- Paper and cardboard
- Bottles and cans
- Leaves and yard waste
- Car batteries
- TVs, computers, and other electronics
- Home appliances

In case you *still* need a reason:

Solid-waste reduction and recycling help reduce global climate change. Creating goods out of recycled materials tends to use less energy than creating something from raw materials. And when fewer fossil fuels are burned and/or fewer items are burned in incinerators, less carbon dioxide is spewed into the atmosphere.

What do the numbers (1-7) and letters (PETE, HDPE, V, LDPE, PP, PS, etc.) on plastic products mean?

They're part of a coding system created by the Society of the Plastics Industry to help recyclers sort plastics. The lower the number, the easier that type of plastic is to recycle. PETE (Polyethylene Terephthalate) and HDPE (High-density polyethylene), numbers 1 and 2, respectively, are used to make a variety of containers—for water, food, and personal care products—and are therefore the most commonly recycled plastics.



"Solid-waste reduction and recycling help reduce global climate change. Creating goods out of recycled materials tends to use less energy than creating something from raw materials."

What else should I recycle?

Recycling goes beyond basic paper, plastic, glass, and cans. "There are markets for everything," says CET's Jaime Cahillane. "It doesn't mean there is a *local* market for them." Online sites can help you locate a "market." Search www.Earth911.org to find locations for recycling appliances and other items according to Zip Code. The Springfield [Mass.] Materials Recycling Facility (www.springfieldmrf.org) also offers extensive information on recycling items that are not accepted for curbside pickup or at your local transfer station.

Electronic waste is the fastest growing segment of the municipal waste stream, according to Greenpeace International. Information compiled for the 2006 United Nations Basel Convention to "address the growing challenge of electronic wastes" estimates 20 to 50 million metric tons of e-waste are generated worldwide every year. Cellphones are among the most frequently disposed items, with Americans swapping them out about every two years for newer, flashier models. The phones contain lead, arsenic, cadmium, and other toxins that can be released into the air and leach into water sources if tossed in the trash. CET and many manufacturers and service providers will recycle old phones for you, for free.



REDUCE

Start composting.

CET's Cahillane estimates 20 to 25 percent of residential trash is food waste or yard scraps. Composting can be done both indoors and out and can substantially reduce the amount of trash generated by a household. In Cahillane's household, thanks to recycling and composting, his family of four has reduced the trash it generates to one thirty-gallon bag every two weeks.

REUSE

One man's trash is another man's treasure ...

Remember hauling empty jars with lids, egg cartons, even used popsicle sticks to elementary school and handing them over to the art teacher? A number of online sites have ushered this concept into the twenty-first century. Before throwing out something usable or running out to buy it new, check out Craigslist online classifieds (www.westernmass.craigslist.org). Freecycle (www.freecycle.org) is another online option that suggests helpful ways to reduce waste, save resources, and put usable items into hands that need or want them. (As the name implies, items discarded or acquired through the site must be free.) Berkshire County's four-year-old Freecycle network (groups.yahoo.com/group/BerkshireCountyFreecycle) alone has 1,623 members and counting.

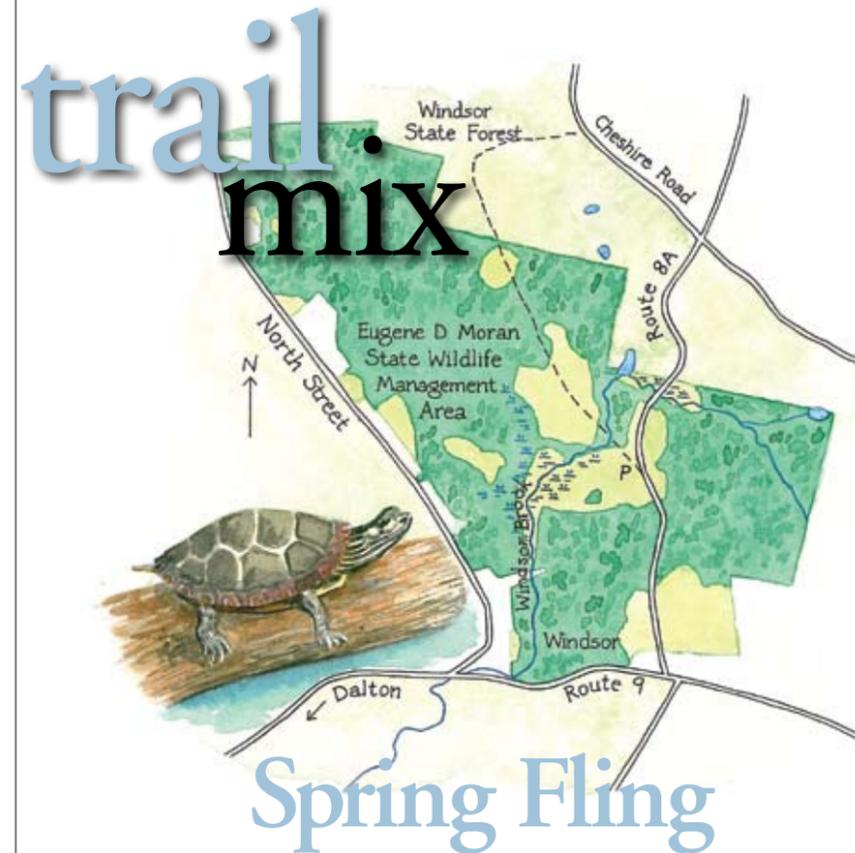
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REPURPOSE IT!

Could the item you're about to toss be modified and used in a different way?

Recently, I rearranged my living room. The three-tier entertainment center, purchased at a tag sale for ten dollars five years ago, had certainly lived a full life. But no sooner had I removed it from my apartment than someone spotted it and didn't see it as trash at all. A hacksaw, a few screws, and a couple of coats of black paint transformed my unwanted monster into a sleek, modern-looking unit—one I didn't even recognize when I saw it in its new home. **BL**

Carrie Saldo is WAMC Northeast Public Radio's Berkshire Bureau Chief and a freelance journalist. She believes eco-responsible lifestyles demand our support and that humanity is up to the challenge.



WRITTEN BY TAD AMES
ILLUSTRATION BY ALISON KOLESAR

WILD, BREEZY, AND EXPOSED, Windsor, Massachusetts, feels like the roof of the Berkshires. For outdoorsy types, the town is perhaps best known for Notchview Reservation, the outstanding cross-country ski center owned and operated by the Trustees of Reservations. But the town boasts other treasures as well, one being the Eugene D. Moran Wildlife Management Area (WMA), hiding in plain sight on Route 8A.

More an experience than a classic hike, Moran is a place to lie on your back while the sky skids by; to count wildflowers in reawakening woods; to spot bluebirds over the meadows; to scout the shallows of beaver ponds for the sound of spring peepers or the sight of painted turtles catching the year's first warm sunbeams. The area, owned by the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, is a patchwork of wet marsh, meadows, spruce, and deciduous forests. Spring takes its time settling in at these high elevations—most of Windsor lies above 2,000 feet—and the trees hold their buds closed for a week or two after their lower-growing cousins have opened up.

From the Allendale area of nearby Pittsfield, follow Route 9 up through Dalton, Massachusetts, before turning left, or north, on Route 8A at the top of the mountain in Windsor. Although the Moran area encompasses most of the land on both sides of the road, the recommended parking area is on the left, about three-quarters of a mile north.

A gravel road departs from the lot, crossing both open and wooded lands, leaving the Moran WMA and entering the Windsor State Forest before ending at Cheshire Road. But for anyone with waterproof boots and a sense of adventure, the road is only the jumping-off point for exploring grassy corners, marsh edges, and woodland crannies. Long views of Mount Greylock highlight the scenery, but are almost beside the point. Land, water, and sky sing together at Moran with a rare and vast harmony, which is lovely at any time of year, but which gives particular joy as spring asserts itself. **BL**

Tad Ames is president of Berkshire Natural Resources Council.

THE GOODS

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THE GOODS

Mass Wildlife
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