



## **Topia Inn**

### **Contact:**

### **1. Overview**

We are a 10 room eco inn in the Berkshires. In 2004 my partner and I purchased an abandoned lodge in the center of Adams. We renovated the building with non toxic, sustainable materials, recycling whenever possible. We built and are operating according to LEED Platinum guidelines. Our beds and linens are all organic; we provide chemical free natural products for the guests in all the rooms, breakfast in the morning is from fresh organic products, our walls are finished with clay earth plaster. We power the building with photo-voltaic solar panels and burn 100% biofuel for heat and hot water. We created a green store to continue selling the green products we use in the inn. We have been included in the National Solar Tour for the past few years and we have shown our products at many green fairs and conferences.

My interest in sustainability began 30 years ago while studying at Duke University I took a summer course in Energy Alternatives. We lived in tents for 5 weeks and learned how to build solar panels and had hot showers. I also lived in Athens, Greece for many years where there is sun 360 days a year. One can see solar panels on virtually every roof in the city. The rural areas have modern windmills on the mountaintops that generate power. The decision to build an all green, sustainable building was for personal reasons because this is what we believe in and because of Caryn's chemical sensitivities. It was completed and opened in July of 2007 prior to the current trend to be green.

### **2. Program Establishment**

Our mission is to create living and working places that are responsible to the inhabitants

and the environment.

It was a very slow and arduous task because the information was not easily available to us at the time. Practically everyone tried to convince us not to build the building green because it was too difficult, slow and costly. Our first Architect attempted to talk us out of installing solar panels. Luckily we found another Architect who specialized in green building. He was much more helpful and was able to guide the contractor in the direction we wanted to go. Still there was an enormous amount of research we had to do on our own. Practically all of the research we did was on the Internet on search engines. We contacted the manufacturer of all the building materials we purchased and requested the MSDS from them. We discovered wonderful products such as cotton batt insulation made from recycled denim jeans, Stabiligrd pervious pavers, FSC certified wood from local landowners, low or no VOC paints, stains and sealers. We were surprised by the Building Inspector's willingness to educate himself about the unusual materials we preferred to use. For example, at one point the contractor needed fire caulk. So I typed in non-toxic fire caulk in Google and came up with a company called JACO. I gave the fact sheet to the Building Inspector and it was approved. Eventually the construction workers began commenting on how much better it felt to work with these products. The team we assembled to renovate the building learned about the products and how to apply them as we discovered them from day to day. At times the task was so difficult I never thought we would actually get through to completion. After two and a half years we finally opened the doors to the inn on Al Gore's Earth celebration, July 7, 2007. Several months later the Berkshire Visitor's Bureau recognized Topia Inn with the 2007 Outstanding Innovation and Renovation Award.

### **3. Goals and Benchmarking**

One factor that helps us measure our success is the fact that for the past year and a half we have been able to accommodate people who have serious chemical sensitivities, including the middle aged son of the man who sold us the building. Several people have stayed with us who otherwise would have no other place to go. Our operating and cleaning practices qualify us for LEED Platinum status according to an Agent from the USGBC and Berkshire Green Builders and we are currently applying for that status.

Another measure of success is the volume of eco-minded travelers we have met who have stayed at the Inn and who would not have otherwise come to Adams.

One of the challenges is keeping the organic nature of the furnishings and products chemical free. People sometimes come into the building with fragrances and pesticides. We ask them to take off their shoes or cover them with booties we provide at the entrance. Our beds and linens are organic and we provide all natural bath and body products for our guests to use. In our policy on our website and on our confirmation email is that guests are requested to leave their products at home and use only the complimentary products we provide them. This policy has been willingly honored by practically everyone who has stayed here.

The other challenge is to buy organic food that we serve the guests. We cannot always find local organic food at our local supermarket so we have to travel to a market that has organic produce.

#### **4. Outcomes and Environmental Benefit**

We have significantly reduced the carbon footprint of our guests and improved their ecological impact without giving up aesthetics or comfort, which has pleasantly surprised our guests. Our building is burning 100% biodiesel year 'round, which has almost no emissions. We are generating one quarter of our power with the sun's renewable energy. We recycle and compost and produce a minimal amount of waste. We buy local organic in order to support our local farmers in their sustainable practice. Our pervious pavers and rain garden absorb rain-water into the ground to feed the aquifer. Our grassy driveways further lower our carbon footprint. The Inn also functions as an "environmental home center" allowing guests to experience the green products they are considering purchasing and we have had many architects and potential buyers of green products stay with us and take the time to become better educated about green possibilities.

#### **5. Relevance to Traveler or Travel Industry**

Adams, MA is a largely forgotten mill town. While all of the other large towns in the Berkshires have seen signs of revitalization through cultural tourism, Adams has been left behind. Since we opened Topia Inn people interested in staying at a green inn have come to Adams to stay with us all year round. They have reported to us that one of their main criteria for choosing us was the green aspect as well as the aesthetic experience of the place.

#### **6. Real-World Example**

Our first contact with our guests is typically through our website where they can read about the green practices and see the artist-decorated rooms. In a confirmation email they are asked to leave their products at home and only use the complimentary bath and body products we provide for them in their bathroom. Once they arrive we do a brief tour of the building where we show them the meters in the living room that track the amount of energy we generate from the sunlight. We point out the sustainable floors and countertops, the natural clay finish on the walls and the organic beds and linens. We also provide bicycles for their use on the Achuwilticook bike trail. We have a green store where they can purchase any of the green products we have - from lotions to mattresses to the clay. We clean with steam vapor and natural non toxic cleaners.