





# HISTORIC **GOES GREEN** IN OXFORD

**Two aging properties receive  
much more than a facelift**

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By Carol Sorgen  
Photography by Tony Lewis, Jr.



**B**arbara Paca and Philip Logan are committed in both their personal and professional lives to being both environmentally conscious and culturally sensitive. Their dual-phased home and work-space project in Historic Oxford speaks to both those aims.

The designer couple, who spend much of their time in New York when not traveling around the world on their many commissions (as part of their Oxford Think Tank and Preservation Green Design and Horticultural Research Center), wanted to establish a second home and satellite office for themselves and their family. After narrowing their choices to Essex, Connecticut, and Oxford, Maryland, one of their friends (who had, coincidentally, made the very same choice) helped them make up their mind: "Oxford has watermen, an African American community, and people who like to read books!" The decision was made.

Once settled in Oxford, Paca and Logan began looking at properties in town with the goal of creating a quiet-use research and office compound for Preservation Green, a minority-owned entity that focuses on sustainable architecture and landscape design. The spaces they found, at 101 and 103 Mill Street, were abandoned, but had once been restaurants and a former R&B music destination frequented by music-lovers from Washington, D.C.

"These were properties that needed love," Paca says. They were also in the midst of Oxford's African American community, and the couple solicited input from their neighbors before moving forward with any plans.

"We worked hard with the old families there, who are as much Founding Families as my own," says Paca, whose family first arrived in Maryland in the mid-1600s, and whose ancestors include William Paca, a signer of the Declaration of Independence and Maryland Governor.

The projects were undertaken in 2010–2011 ("when the economy was especially gloomy") and today include their living space, as well as a private research and landscape design center and greenhouse for Paca, a world-renowned landscape designer and art historian whose commissions range from historic preservation, to the restoration of small residential properties and large estates, to public park master plans and roof gardens.

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Paca uses the facility to explore hundreds of plant cultivars, new methods of protecting the Chesapeake's ecosystems, and the benefits of green roof applications on built structures. The building achieved LEED Gold status for new construction, and was also awarded the AIA Chesapeake Bay Excellence in Design Awards for 2015.

The second phase of the compound (whose "courtyard" design came to Paca and Logan while they were picnicking on the boat of their neighbors, renowned artist James Turrell and his artist wife, Kyung) features the Oxford Think Tank, in addition to the architectural studio for Preservation Green. Designed for local residents engaged in quiet-use occupations such as writers, lawyers, and artists, the building is a tranquil green setting that is both stimulating and inspirational, says Logan, AIA LEED AP, whose focus as an architect is the transformation of historic structures and the integration of green technologies, as well as ADA compliant practices. The building is also being used for various sustainability workshops for members of the community to learn about the green strategies used on site that they, in turn, could incorporate into their own homes or offices.







Together, the buildings were designed to form a compound that represents sustainable environmental practices such as rooftop solar panels (approved by the Historic Commission), installation of the first green roof in Oxford (there are now three green roofs on the property), cutting-edge storm water management, rain water harvesting, organic building materials, in addition to aesthetic beauty.

Through a greening strategy that has involved planting the entire length of Mill Street on both sides with a combination of drought- and heat-tolerant native plants, hardy perennials, shrubs, vines, and trees, Paca and Logan have extended their inventions to creating a “living silt fence,” ensuring that the street is better able to withstand storms and flooding, which benefits not only their own buildings but neighboring homes as well, in addition to beautifying the location.

The interiors of the buildings are as environmentally sensitive as the exteriors,

incorporating recycled and repurposed materials, products, and equipment from the old buildings. For example, there are more than 40 recycled antique doors and a wood floor made with reclaimed lumber from Read Street Pharmacy in Baltimore, the first drugstore to serve the African American community. The horticultural center features two masonry tile stoves that were brought over from Switzerland that use renewable firewood from the Eastern Shore forests and provide the main source of heating during the winter months.

Today, when the designers recall that neighbors initially wanted them to demolish the buildings because of their state of disrepair, they are happy that they have been able to stay true to their philosophy of combining historic restoration with innovative vision and, as a result, reviving and preserving important elements of Oxford’s history and community.

“This was a labor of love,” they say. “It was the right thing to do.”

