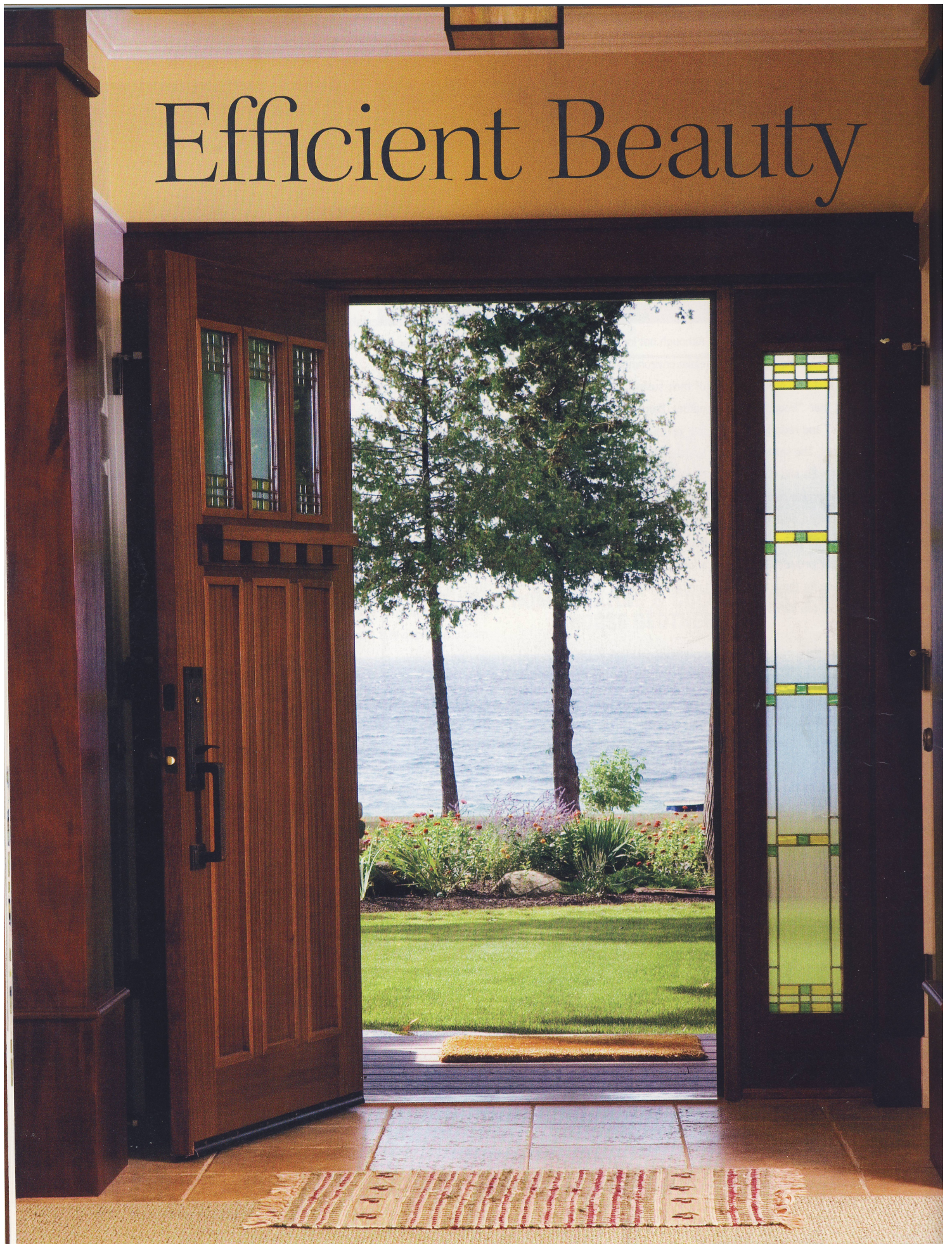
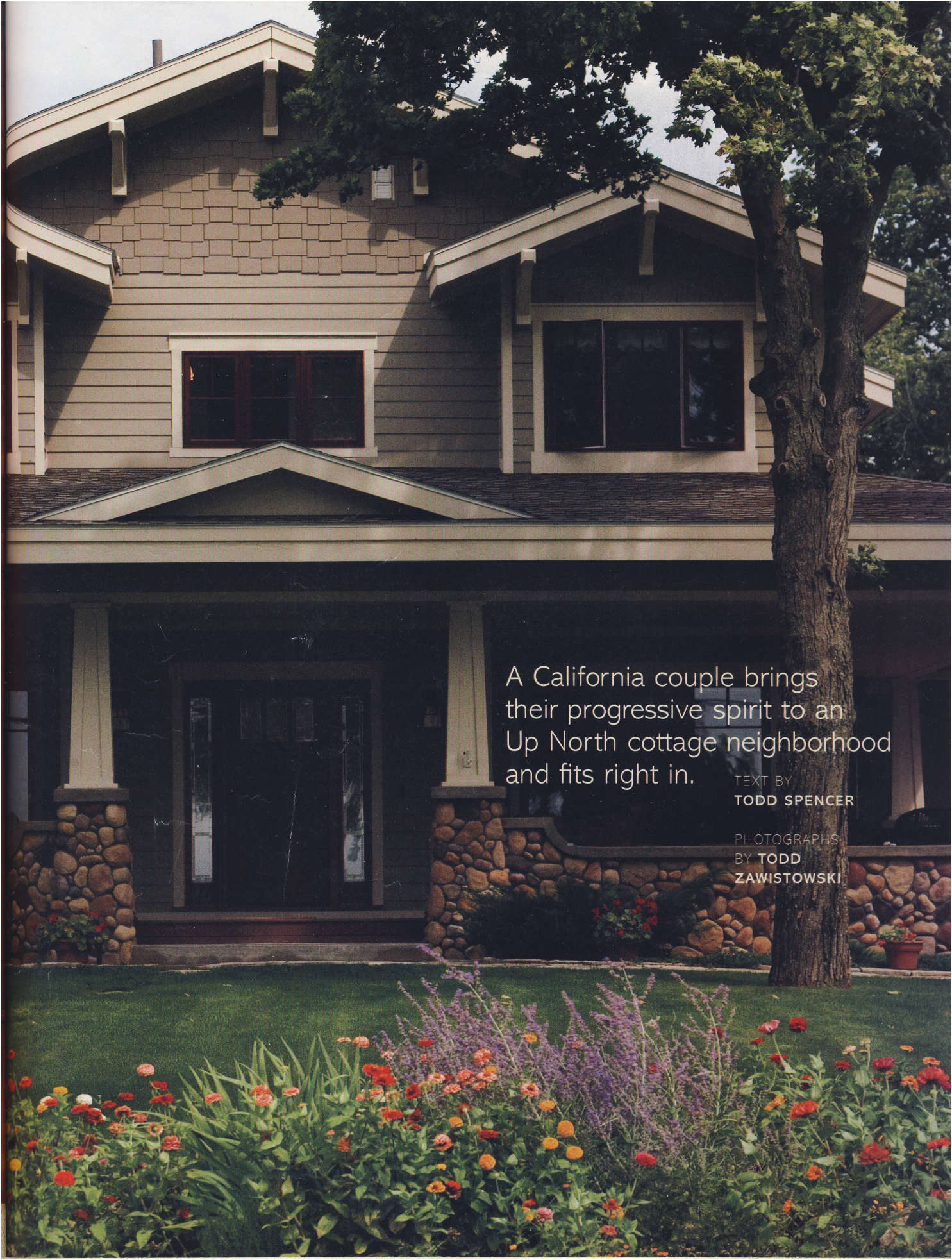


Efficient Beauty





A California couple brings
their progressive spirit to an
Up North cottage neighborhood
and fits right in.

TEXT BY
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PHOTOGRAPHS
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LEFT: Jim made the planter on the front porch from recycled lath. **BELOW:** A handmade sign in Jim's woodshop (renovated from the old Omena Inn's summer playhouse), along with some old tools. **OPPOSITE:** Adirondack chairs are ringside seats to the ever-changing colors of Omena Bay. **PREVIOUS PAGES:** On a clear night, the lights of Traverse City can be seen in the front door's south-facing view. The home's generous Craftsman-style overhangs practically eliminate the need for air conditioning.

Set in a winding row of circa-1900 cottages across from cove-like Omena Bay, Jim and Kathy Miller's home is a green experiment gone right. It fits in so well that strangers have stopped their cars to ask the recent transplants from California (though Kathy is a Michigan native) how they came to own the 19TH-century Omena Inn—which is actually located two doors down from the Millers.

The truth is that the Millers built this home just four years ago on a wildly overgrown lot that used to be the old inn's tennis court. With its broad-shouldered Craftsman exterior, stone-faced wrap-around porch and generously landscaped yard, the home looks as though it has graced this setting for many decades.

But this house speaks to the future as much as, if not more than, it hearkens to the past. Admiring passersby would be surprised to learn that the porch's decking is not wood at all, but planks made from recycled milk jugs stamped with a convincing wood-grain finish. And that the siding is not cedar but a tree-saving cement-fiber product called HardiePlank.

The single most substantial eco feature, though, is that the frame and roof are constructed from





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—KATHY MILLER

Structural Insulated Panels (SIPs), manufactured by the Michigan-based company Insulspan—and named by *Sustainable Industries Journal* as one of the top 10 green building products of 2007.

The energy-efficient panels are made out of foam sandwiched between boards made from farmed, fast-growth trees and use a fraction of the wood needed for conventional stick-frame construction.

Insulspan sized and manufactured each panel according to custom specifications for the home, then delivered two semi-trucks of prefab panels ready to assemble. Jim says the process

eliminated days of framing because the panels, which are heavier and stronger than a traditional stick frame, merely need to be fitted together.

To a remarkable degree, the panel construction keeps out lake winds—including the 60-m.p.h. gales of November that whistle through the other homes and cottages along Omena Bay. Since SIPs so effectively seal against outside air, an air-exchange system in the basement circulates fresh air in and out of the house—without sacrificing energy efficiency. “Our [energy] bills seem to be significantly lower than conventionally built homes in our area, including some smaller homes,” Kathy says.

Though warm and snug, the home’s layout is open and spacious—well-suited to the couple’s love of entertaining. According to Traverse City-based Clark Walter Serrine Architects, designers

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: The breakfast nook unites Craftsman and cottage styles, and affords sunrise views. Jim captured the view from the front porch on ceramic tiles he painted for the stove’s backsplash. A painting of Jim’s, featured on a wine label released by neighboring Leelanau Wine Cellars, rests on the easel in his studio.

Look Ma, **no tank**



In the spirit of energy efficiency, the Millers opted for a Rinnai Continuum tankless water heater. The heater, a smallish device mounted to their basement wall, costs about \$500 more up front than a traditional water tank. The couple will eventually recoup that money because tankless heaters are about 50 percent more efficient than traditional heaters since they heat water only on demand—about eight gallons of 120-degree water a minute when the faucet is turned on. The only drawback to a tankless unit is a short wait for the hot water to start flowing. The Millers deal by brushing their teeth before hopping in their morning shower.



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of the Miller home, the superior structural integrity of SIPs expands the possibility of open space in a floor plan because the panels support sheer, horizontal and vertical loads.

Efficient and eco-friendly as they are, SIPs are merely the bones of this lovely house. The beauty that guests feel when they walk in—and that the Millers appreciate daily—is the home's harmony with its charming natural setting. The covered porch that looks onto Omena Bay, the breakfast nook with its sunrise-over-water views and the upstairs windows that jut out to offer three-direction panoramas all contribute to that connection. In this home filled with ingenious design and building ideas, the Millers point to one of the simplest as a favorite: their ground-floor master bedroom is a one-story wing off the two-story home. When it rains as they drift off to sleep, the drops hit the roof just a few feet above their heads almost as if they are in a tent. "It's an amazing sound. We just love it," Jim says. 🏡

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CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: The expansive open shower off the master bedroom. The screened-in porch, also off the master bedroom, is outfitted with wicker chairs and a handmade rug braided from recycled rags by Kathy's mother, Brenda Kerrigan. Also note the Trex flooring, made in part from recycled milk jugs.