

ON LOCATION

Lottsburg, Va.

Rubbing Out the Footprints

On Virginia's Northern Neck, an executive builds his habitat while restoring what others took away from nature.

By ELIZABETH EVITTS DICKINSON

There are places that immediately feel sacred: something about the air, the view, the way the landscape resonates with your soul.

This is how William H. Dean felt when he discovered the Northern Neck, a coastal region in Virginia. It was 2008 and Mr. Dean was looking for waterfront property near his home in Washington. As the chief executive of M. C. Dean, an electrical engineering company in Dulles, Va., he had a stressful professional life and wanted a weekend refuge.

Mr. Dean, now 48, was "shocked at the beauty of it," he said. "I'm like a real estate stalker when I find what I want, and I kept going back."

The stalking paid off. A developer had acquired a peninsula there known as Honest Point, with plans to turn it into a subdivision, but when the economy collapsed, Mr. Dean bought all 16 acres at the juncture of the Potomac River and the Chesapeake Bay. He was "overtaken by the openness of the land, the beauty of the water, and the wildlife," he said. "The people are the smallest part of the ecosystem."

Even so, they had left their mark. The land had been deforested and the soil depleted from decades of farming, and at the tip of the peninsula, an abandoned oyster processing plant was crumbling onto the shore.

Today, after a \$4 million investment, a four-bedroom house floats above the water on wood pilings, just off the shore where the plant once stood. Mr. Dean calls it the Oyster House as a nod to the building it replaced.

The 4,145-square-foot home, designed by Dale Overmyer Architects, consists of two structures, one for entertaining and the other for the private quarters, connected by a glass-enclosed bridge. A boardwalk links the house to two garages on the mainland with more living space upstairs; another connects to a dock with six boat slips. (Mr. Dean and his friends often travel from Washington by boat.) But nearly a quarter of the budget went to restoring the land, a project overseen by Oehme, van Sweden landscape architecture, which brought in truckloads of fresh soil with the nutrients necessary to cultivate native



1

1. William Dean's house rests on wood pilings above the Chesapeake Bay and is connected to land by a boardwalk. The home, which he calls Oyster House, consists of two structures joined by a glass-enclosed bridge. Mr. Dean uses the one on the left for entertaining; the one on the right is the private living space.



4

plants, grasses, shrubs and trees.

Because Mr. Dean's company specializes in electric and communications technology, the Oyster House has touch screens that control temperature, lighting and media in every room, and live video

feeds that allow him to monitor the house from afar. "I can be in my office," he said, "and still keep an eye on things."

But it's hard to imagine the home sitting empty for long. It has become such a hub of activity for friends and family, Mr. Dean



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3. Elizabeth Hague, Mr. Dean's interior designer, chose Matouk linens in ivory for the beds and had the headboards custom made. The Wickman Swing Arm Sconces are from Palmer Hargrave; the bedside tables are from Bungaow 5.

4. Dale Overmyer Architects designed the walnut and stainless-steel dining table. The fireplace surround is made from oyster shell-encrusted concrete slab salvaged from the oyster processing plant that once stood on the site. The sofa is from the Charles Stewart Company; the Snowflake Pendant Light is by David Trubridge.

said, that he plans to build more houses on his property. Recently, he offered a lot to one of his brothers, but he turned it down.

Mr. Dean recalled: "He laughed and said, 'Why would I build my own house, when I can come to yours?'"

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