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William Dean's house rests on wood pilings above the Chesapeake Bay and is connected to land by a boardwalk. More Photos »

By ELIZABETH EVITTS DICKINSON Published: July 10, 2013

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

#### Multimedia



Rubbing Out the Footprints

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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

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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 plants, grasses, shrubs and trees.

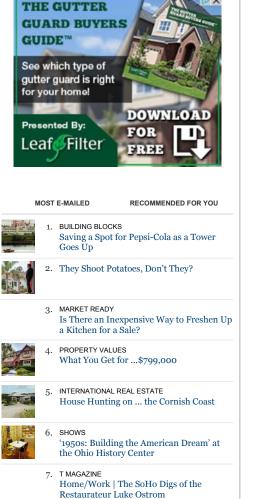
Because Mr. Dean's company specializes in electric and communications technology, the Oyster House has touch screens that control temperature, lighting and media in every room, and live video feeds that allow him to monitor the house from afar. "I can be in my office," he said, "and still keep an eye 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 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?' "

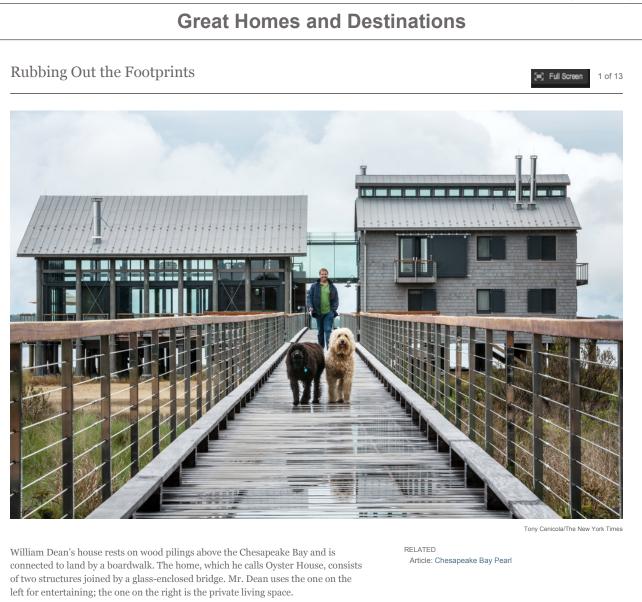
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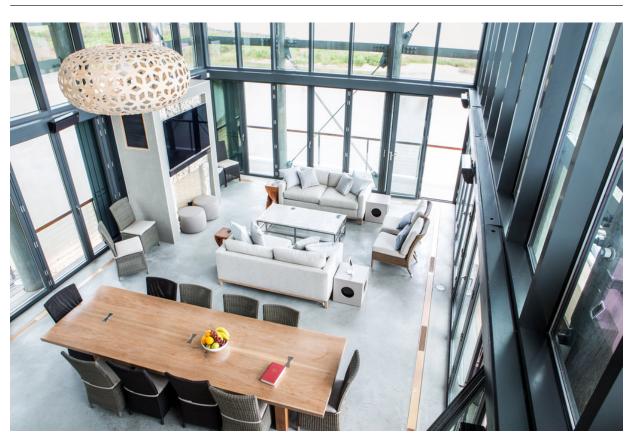
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Tony Cenicola/The New York Times

Dale Overmyer Architects designed the walnut and stainless-steel dining table. The fireplace surround is made from an 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.

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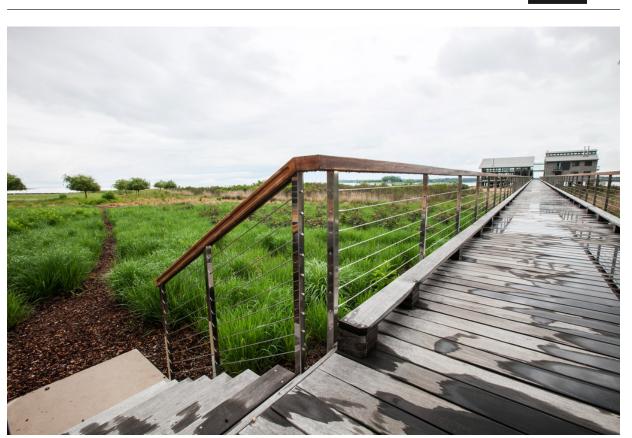
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Tony Cenicola/The New York Times

The walkway from the mainland to the house traverses marsh grasses and tidal pools that were carefully restored by landscape architects at Oehme, van Sweden. Tens of thousands of native plants, grasses and shrubs and 220 new trees were planted on the 16-acre property to restore the land's ecological health.

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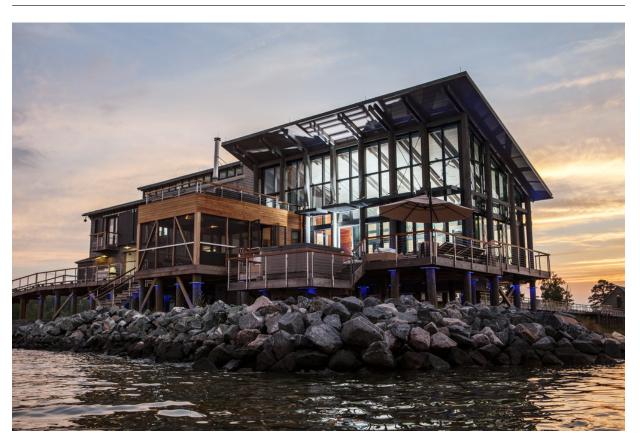
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Tony Cenicola/The New York Times

Many of Mr. Dean's guests arrive by boat, and from the water the Oyster House appears to float above the land. George Sexton Associates of Washington designed the exterior lighting plan in a surprising yet subtle shade of blue that accents the building's architecture.

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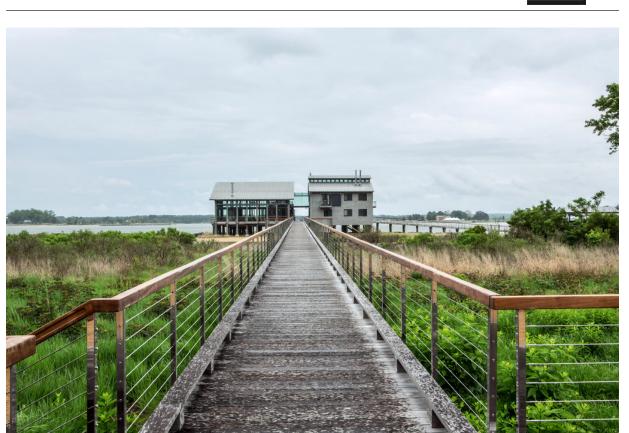
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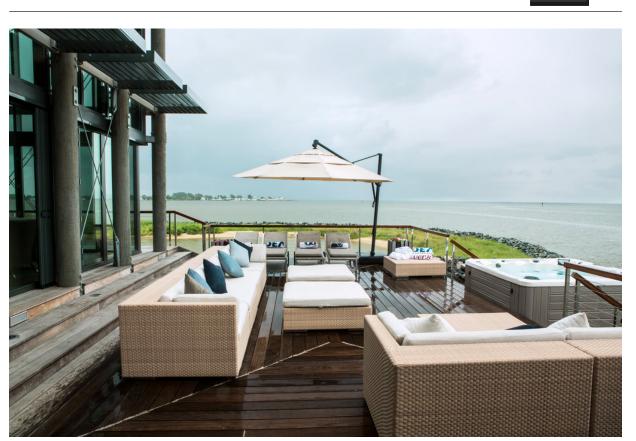
The Oyster House is decidedly contemporary — and built to 100-year storm standards — but it still manages to feel of a piece with the regional vernacular. The sloping stainless steel roof of the main pavilion takes its cues from the area's maritime architecture, resembling one of the many boat sheds that dot the waterfront. Weather-hardy cedar clads the exterior and is reminiscent of the cedar shake roofs of local farmhouses.

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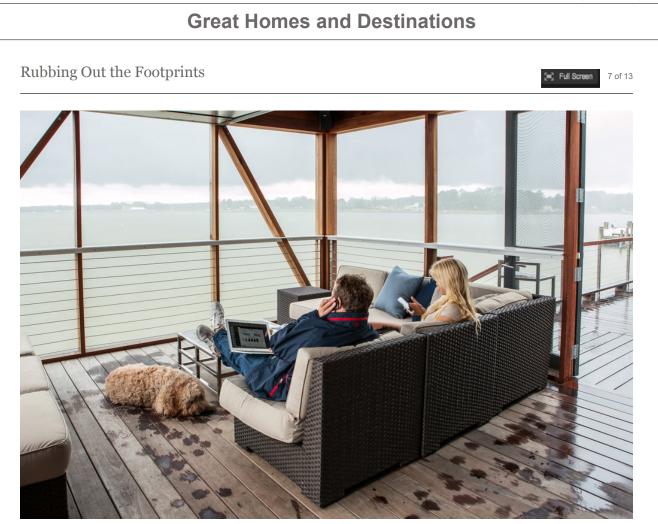
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The home has several decks, including this main outdoor space off the living room. The hot tub from Caldera Spa seats seven. RELATED Article: Chesapeake Bay Pearl

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Tony Cenicola/The New York Times

Mr. Dean and a guest relax on the deck off the kitchen. Because this house is also wired for entertaining, a flat-screen TV is recessed into the roof and encased in a hurricane-proof metal box. It can be electronically lowered via remote control.

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Tony Cenicola/The New York Times

The layout of the home expertly channels the views, allowing nature to supply the primary décor. From this vantage you can see some of the nearly 100 wooden pilings that were used to raise the house above the floodplain; the pilings double as structural support for the home. "The structure itself is integral to the architecture, which makes the house functional and beautiful at the same time," Mr. Dean says.

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The coastal wildlife is one of the things that attracted Mr. Dean to Honest Point. Since restoring the landscape, Mr. Dean has witnessed an uptick in wildlife visiting his property. RELATED Article: Chesapeake Bay Pearl

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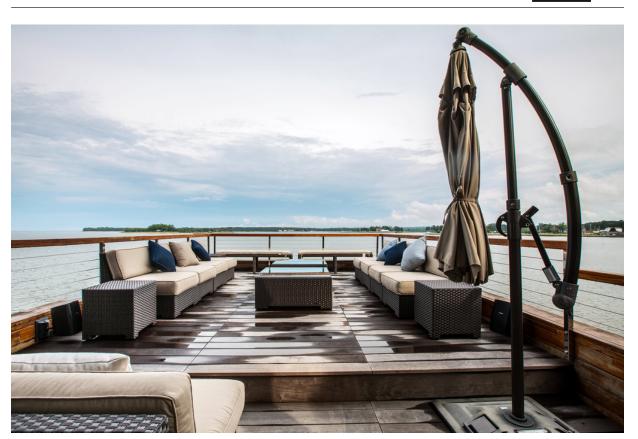
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Tony Cenicola/The New York Times

This upper deck sits off Mr. Dean's indoor poker room. The decks are fabricated from Ipe, a dense hardwood that is resistant to mildew and decay. The architects left the Ipe untreated so that it will turn a natural silvery gray color with age, to match the house's cedar shingles.

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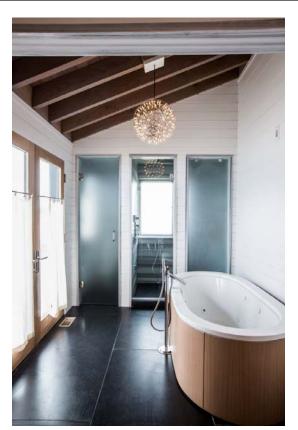
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Tony Cenicola/The New York Times

The tub in the master bathroom is from Jason International; the faucets are from the Hansgrohe Axor Starck collection. The light is from Moooi.

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Tony Cenicola/The New York Times

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 Bungalow 5.

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Tony Cenicola/The New York Times

Mr. Dean and his dogs in the glass-enclosed hurricane-proof walkway that connects to the two sections of the house. The flooring is rift-sawn white oak.

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