

Mr. Taylor has a slightly more traditional home, except for its location. Next door to the family cottage area of Mr. Taylor's childhood, the house he and his wife now occupy is far off the beaten track, and far from any hydro poles or gas lines. Situated by a picturesque pond deep in the woods where wildlife of all kinds make regular appearances, the property includes a wind mill and solar panels. The 25-acre wood lot also provides the fuel for the stove which heats the small, compact home. The fridge and cookstove run on propane, and there is a propane stove for back-up to ensure the home doesn't freeze up during the couple's absences. The solar panels and windmill combine to provide the electricity source to power the lights, the television and the stereo. The two-story home includes a shower (with hot water) and a composting toilet, as well as an outhouse.

In both cases however, the residents acknowledge that the lifestyle does take work. But so far, in neither case, are they complaining.

Mr. Weir approaches the lighting of the fire in the masonry stove as a ceremony – a ritual.

"It's a religious type of feeling," says the painter and drum maker whose home includes a studio filled with art works. "It's the warming of the hearth." He feels that his home is a living thing, and suggests that is the case for all homes.

"Your house is alive. You've got to keep working on it," he says.

"It's definitely interactive," says Ms. Allan, who has settled into this peaceful lifestyle after 20 years of building props for the Stratford Theatre. She now turns her artistic eye to the making of stained glass pieces.

Living in a house that is off the grid and is providing the heat and energy needed right there, it is necessary for the people there to be involved in the process. "You become very aware of your surroundings," says Ms. Allan.

Living off the grid is not for everyone. If you are the type of person who wants to simply come home and flick a switch and not concern yourself any further with the matter, then attempting to live off the grid is not for you, the couple states. But, if you're somebody who "feels they would like to live green" then there are certain benefits.

These benefits are clear as one sits in the spacious home and feels the steady comfort of evenly-heated air. There is also a silence through the combination of three-foot walls and the absence of blowing air as found in most modern homes. Nevertheless, "there's something happening," as Mr. Weir says. "The walls are alive."

At the very least, the combined forces which have been put into motion are at work to provide the energy that is needed.

The drawbacks are felt when the weather doesn't cooperate. Mr. Taylor says the winter is the hardest. Mr. Weir and Ms. Allan noted that even in the warmer seasons, if the weather is overcast for an extended period of time, it causes problems. When using solar power, sunny days are more important than ever. In both cases, the back-up sources of power are critical.

Mr. Taylor's windmill cost \$1,000 to construct, and has been made so that it can be tilted down to rest along the ground when maintenance is required, which is not frequently, according to the homeowner. Generators are located at both properties to be used when other power sources are getting too low.

The masonry heating stove which Mr. Weir lovingly stokes, is built like a kiln. There is a fire chamber and then a second chamber where a second burn takes place. The heat is trapped inside the masonry heater and then radiates from the walls of the heater throughout the day. Water for the hot water pipes which run through the floors and heat them is also heated by the masonry stove, and by the propane boiler which is a back-up system.

Outside, a small solar panel on the side of the house includes an electrical panel which provides the power for the water pump to run the system.



South-facing windows and solar panels are important in a straw-bale home.

*"Your house is alive.
You've got to keep
working on it."*

Ron Taylor is at home deep in scenic country, far away from hydro lines.

