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**Two Artists,
One With the Land,
17 Miles Off the
Coast**

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MODERN
MAKEOVER
on Sebago Lake**

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Six Sustainable
Shops We Love**

**A Danish Builder's
PASSIVE
HOUSE IN THE
MOUNTAINS**



ISLE OF

ON WHEATON ISLAND EACH SUMMER, ARTISTS
BO BARTLETT AND **BETSY EBY** GET BACK TO
NATURE AND DOWN TO WORK

An aerial view of
Wheaton Island captures
Bo and Betsy's studios
and the undisturbed
landscape. Solar panels
by Sundog Solar.

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building & architecture by
HOUSES & BARNs
BY JOHN LIBBY

LIGHT



THE GULL'S-EYE VIEW OF WHEATON Island, situated 23 miles off the coast of Port Clyde (43.8615° N, 68.8798° W), population two, shows a mere handful of buildings: a house, guesthouse, and two studios. This spare assemblage, perched on a rough ledge of rock, sand, and shrub, is the ruggedly lovely summer dwellings of painters Bo Bartlett and Betsy Eby.

The couple reside in Columbus, Georgia, in Bo's childhood home and eagerly anticipate their annual return to this idyllic off-grid retreat where they can focus, recharge, and create. There, surrounded at every angle by sea and sky, the artists adapt to the circadian rhythms of island life, the rising and setting sun, the ebb and flow of tides.

"It just feels like the way that life is supposed to feel," says Bo. "You don't have any outside influences, so you are just one with nature out there, and in that regard, you are so much more alive. Out there, you're given the opportunity to not be distracted. You're brought right up to the cusp of life. And it's a beautiful, beautiful way to live, waking up with the sun and going to sleep when it gets dark."

Bo is a contemporary realist painter, working in the American tradition of Andrew Wyeth and Thomas Eakins. In *See: An Art Road Trip*, the documentary the couple made together in 2007, they take turns describing each other's work. "Bo paints large, narrative paintings about the human condition and drama, filled with distilled action and layers of meaning," says Betsy.

Betsy is an encaustic painter and a classically trained pianist. Her work is abstract, lyrical, and richly textured. "She uses hot wax and she paints with fire," Bo says. "I think she would call it nature-based abstraction, where it's based on forms in the real world, but then she interprets them rhythmically, musically."

Bo bought the island in 1999. While visiting Benner Island, the summer

Bo works on the painting *Dominion*. Skylights and north-facing windows wash the studio in light.





Betsy, a classically trained pianist, keeps a piano in her studio so that she can shift between music and painting.

home of Andrew and Betsy Wyeth (Bo considered Wyeth a mentor and friend), he spied Wheaton in the distance and was intrigued. Five years later, he snapped it up. The island had a 1905-era house, barn, and guesthouse on it, and Bo took to restoring the properties with the help of builder John Libby,

of Houses & Barns by John Libby in Freeport, a friend and summer neighbor on nearby Matinicus Isle. After Bo and Betsy married, Bo called on John in 2010 to build twin “his and hers” studios.

The simple, uninsulated post-and-beam structures were adapted from the company’s 18-by-24-foot

“Harraseeket” model. North-facing skylights capture the light so crucial to the artists, while double barn doors open to ocean views. “We started with that footprint and went with a steeper roof to give it a bit more character,” explains John. Made of Eastern white pine, the white shingle-sided studios look nearly identical from the out-

ISLE OF LIGHT



Betsy prepares canvases in her studio. Behind her is an encaustic work in progress.



Just 20 acres, the unspoiled island is the artists' summer retreat and a constant source of inspiration.



The studio doors open to the weather and the ocean view. "You're given the opportunity to not be distracted," says Bo. "It's a beautiful, beautiful way to live."

side, while the interiors have been adapted to suit the artists' varied needs. Bo's include a loft space and large north-facing windows, Betsy's an upright piano, which she plays throughout her workday ("Going back and forth," says Bo). The structures were painted white inside and out, down to the furnishings, making plain canvases, as it were, for the colorful work created within them.

The timber frames were constructed and painted in John's Freeport warehouse, then dismantled and delivered by an Island Transporter barge (the aptly named *Reliance*). A helicopter lowered timber bundles tagged pink and blue to ensure delivery to the proper locations. "I liked the challenge as much as anything," says John. "Looking at it initially, it looks

like it's absolutely impossible to make that happen, but we enjoy that sort of thing. It was a blast to do."

The studios are set roughly 300 yards apart on the rocky terrain; reaching them is "like walking across a moonscape," John recalls. "They're nuzzled in there beautifully."

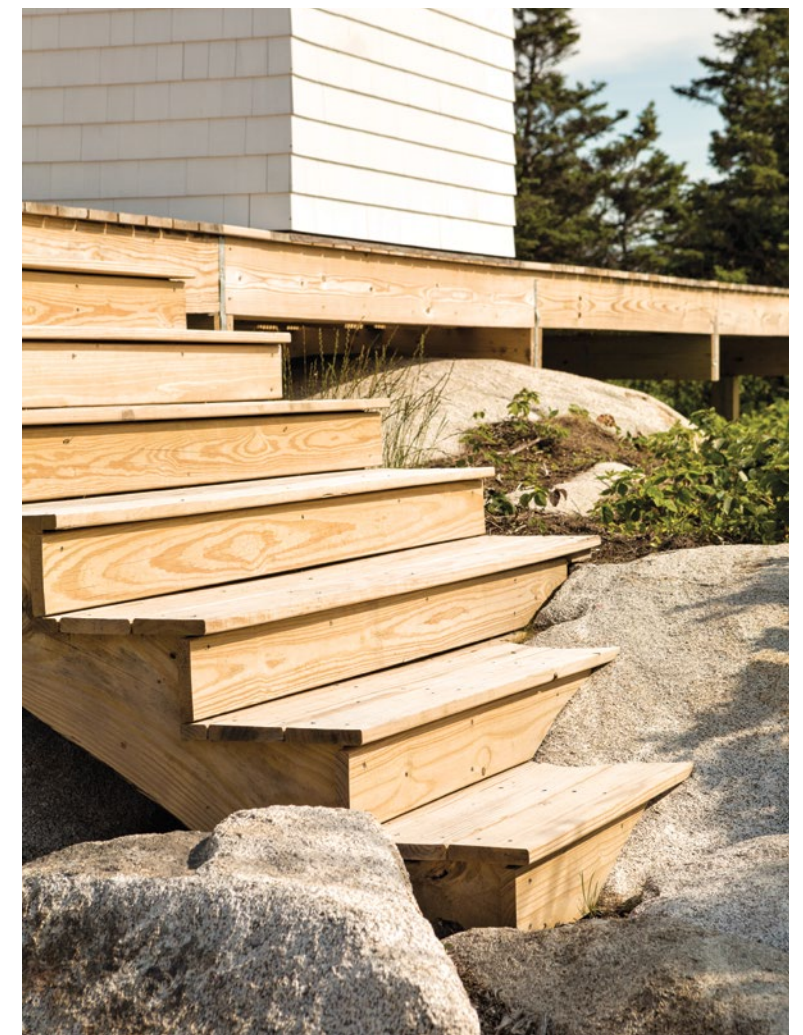
The studios rest on wraparound decks of pressure-treated yellow pine, maintaining a minimal purchase that doesn't encroach more than necessary upon the island's wild, windswept beauty of black spruce and granite. "Betsy's built hers up on a ridge," Bo notes. "I built mine behind a large rock



The two-seater timber frame outhouse, also built by Houses & Barns by John Libby, has the same spare simplicity of the artists' studios.



The studios maintain minimal footprints and appear to almost float on pressure-treated wooden decks. Lumber was sourced from Viking Lumber in Damariscotta.



ISLE OF LIGHT

Keeping the interiors all white, even down to Betsy's piano, was a conscious choice to avoid visual distraction. "It's like you set it and forget it," says Betsy.



Bo reaches his studio loft by a rolling library ladder.

for protection from the north winds. Both studios are in great shape, no difference yet that we can tell in how they stand the winters."

Solar panels on the home and studios provide electricity, and the couple heat and cook with propane. It is a commitment to eco-living,

to be sure. The 20-acre island also possesses the only timber-framed two-seater outhouse around. "It's good and healthy!" John laughs.

"I think because I grew up in the country in Oregon, I've always tried to find my way back through my adult life, and I do this through

my paintings that I make," Betsy explains. "I'm always trying to find my way back to that natural space. I prefer permeable surfaces rather than impermeable surfaces, and the island has that fluidity. My connection with nature is just so piqued out there. It reminds me of who I am."



Bo's studio, in its wild surround. Roofing by B.R.C. Bedard's Roofing Company, located in Lyman.

A local they call Captain Jim ferries the couple to and from the mainland and delivers groceries. Lobstermen also regularly drop off the fruits of their labor. “When we’re out there, you would think we had nothing but blueberries or dandelion roots,” Bo remarks. “But people bring us food all summer long. It’s just a miracle.”

Sustainability is a necessity of island life. The elements can be harsh and unforgiving, and objects must withstand the fury of the weather or be created to succumb to it naturally. “I think it wakes you up from any aspects of sleepwalking that we would do in our daily life,” says Betsy. “It’s really a luxury that we get to do this, steward this little island and live out there on our own, but at the same time, it’s not an easy setup. You have to be superorganized and really vigilant about the tides in particular. And you have to rely on people,

because there are a lot of moving parts to get to live like this.”

“*Steward* is the right word,” Bo adds. “Because, you know, you don’t own the island. The island is there, and you are just like one of the natural wildlife creatures that live on it for a while.”

Leaving the trappings of mainland life behind, the simplicity of these Wheaton sojourns allows the artists to connect with nature and tap the wellspring of their creativity. “The time I spend out there, I always think that it keeps me honest,” says Betsy. “It brings me back to the essence of things. It is a time where my unconscious is so much more fully alive. My dream life is much more complex and colorful when I’m out there.”

Bo readily agrees: “Dreaming and waking are almost the same.” ■