



Summer Star

A wildlife sanctuary in Massachusetts adds an interpretive Trailhead House to facilitate human access

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"We are happier if we realize we are part of all the wild and living world."
— Shalin Liu

Summer Star Wildlife Sanctuary is open to the public only four days a week. The other three days are reserved for the animals and birds that call the forest home. That the owls, otters, and even the trees at the Boylston, Massachusetts, oasis are treated with such deference says much about the Summer Star Foundation for Nature, Art, and Humanity.

The conservation of wildlife habitat in the woods and orchard country northeast of Worcester is the foundation's reason for being, so the new interpretive Trailhead House reinforces the philosophy of Summer Star's guardian angel, Shalin Liu, who believes in the restor-

ative power of nature. "I love going to the mountains, strolling in the wild countryside, meeting with wild animals," says Liu. For her, Summer Star is a place where people can get away from the pressures of urban life and "talk to the trees."

Liu, holder of a master's degree in philosophy from Indiana University and the benefactor of Rockport Music's Shalin Liu Performance Center in Rockport, Massachusetts, has a definite mission for Summer Star's forest pavilion. "We are happier if we realize we are

THE SUMMER STAR Trailhead House, approached through woods and across a small meadow, is intentionally without drama. Planted roofs, a canopy-like trellis, and a modest entrance off to one side gently welcome visitors. It is nature that takes center stage at Summer Star Wildlife Sanctuary, where even the handsome trailside lights are designed to blend in.

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part of all the wild and living world," she says. Thus, it was designed simply as a place to access nearly two miles of trails and encounter its wild denizens — no weddings or parties allowed. Programs for city schoolchildren and senior citizens provide access to those with what she calls "nature deficit disorder." And there is a half-mile wheelchair trail.

Much of the natural landscape in this area of New England has been preserved. The Sudbury Valley Trustees, the Audubon Society, and Tufts Veterinary School all have been involved in local conservation efforts, mapping out trails and protecting land. The Sudbury group helped Liu find the ideal site for Summer Star. The land was to be developed into a 32-lot subdivision, but that faltered and Liu purchased the property. The Trailhead House was completed last autumn. Now Summer Star is part of the extensive Concord River watershed system of trails and conservation easements.

While the earlier developers might have been discouraged by the intractability of the land here — a stubborn memory of the last great ice age, it was precisely the immov-



AFTER PASSING THROUGH the low exhibition spaces, visitors enter the Tree Room (ABOVE AND FACING PAGE), which opens onto the nature preserve, providing a giant viewing platform. Despite the soaring 35-foot height, the faceted fenestration — along with the multifaceted retaining wall — breaks up the sense of a broad expanse of glass. Inside, vertical supports umbrella out like metaphorical trees supporting the forest canopy.



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able boulders that helped shape the outline of the building. The property is a long and narrow wedge, running along a ridge, conditions that invited designers at DSK | Dewing Schmid Kearns Architects + Planners of Concord, Massachusetts, and Boston landscape architect Kaki Martin of Klopfer Martin Design Group to place the trailhead center at one end of the property. "The entrance sequence," says Martin, "is immediately immersive, leading visitors from the parking area, through open meadow, along a path through shady woodland."

Summer Star's commitment to green principles is evident to visitors; there are photovoltaics, green roofs, and composting toilets, all earning the project Gold Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design certification from the US Green Building Council. Yet, short of putting the building underground, how do you realize a structure quieter than the woods around it? Project manager David Chase of DSK responded to the challenge by creating "a piece of art in nature that looks as if it grew out of its surroundings." The massing of the building is low and its cedar walls,

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PHOTOVOLTAIC ARRAYS, VEGETATED ROOFS (FACING PAGE, TOP), and shading pergolas (ABOVE) are elements that contribute to Summer Star's LEED Gold rating. Various wings of the building are inserted into the landscape. A rain chain at the end of a gutter formed by an extended I-beam (FACING PAGE, BOTTOM) channels water on a boulder left in place.

woods with giant, randomly placed windows. In addition to wood finishes, there are galvanized metal railings, exposed structural steel, and free-form granite benches that look like rock formations. There is no shop or restaurant at Summer Star. The building does not invite you to linger; rather, it encourages you to head out to interact with the forest's flora and fauna.

The architecture is praiseworthy, but as much for what it is not than as a design statement. As Ron McA Dow, former director of the Sudbury Valley Trustees, says of the new building, "It is a place of tranquility and reflection ... the paths lead to a quiet, joyful place of being."

According to architect David Chase, "Organic shapes, inverted sloping angles, and multifaceted masses result in harmony, cohesion, and sustainability."

Thus, the Trailhead House celebrates nature and is part of its landscape. Liu says it best: "On the way in this morning, I saw a woodpecker, a hawk, bluebirds, and an otter. Nature and I are one — as simple and as beautiful as can be." ■

vegetated roof, and the proximity of mature trees help it blend in. Chip Dewing, principal of DSK, says Summer Star is "playful and idiosyncratic," just "a threshold for heading out into the woods."

The trailhead building melds with the landscape as you move through it. The domestically scaled, sheltered entrance leads to the Linden Street Gallery, a display area for changing exhibitions. Beyond is a darkened room called the Cave, where visitors can watch a live feed from the Healing Cave at Tufts (rehabilitated owls and hawks are often released back into the wild at Summer Star).

At the woods end of the building, a 35-foot-tall space serves as a lofty introduction to the 45-acre microcosm of nature outside. This Tree Room embraces the

■ **Summer Star Wildlife Sanctuary** 690 Linden Street; Boylston, MA; 508-869-3434; summerstarwildlife.org; Open Saturday through Tuesday, dawn to dusk. Trailhead House open 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.