

# What's better than free, reclaimed, local materials? Child labor!

THE NATICK COMMUNITY ORGANIC FARM (NCOF), a 27-acre patchwork of pastures, cropland, woodlands, streams, and nature trails 20 miles from the center of Boston, has been continuously farmed for 300 years. For the last 30 years, this nonprofit, town-owned farm has had a tri-fold focus: organic stewardship of open public space, providing the community with organic products, and year-round, hands-on education for all ages. With the help of kids, interns, college students, and volunteers, the farmers produce vegetables, maple syrup, small fruits, eggs, goat milk, poultry, pork, and beef.

The heart and soul of the farm (aside from its dark soil) is an 1815 barn, timber-framed of sash-sawn oak (very likely milled on the Charles river just a few hundred yards away). Legend says that the logs came from local trees blown over in the Gale of 1815.

Every summer the farm is abuzz with groups of kids ages 4 to 18—some 60 kids and teachers on an average day. For the past four summers, I have directed the oldest group, the teen work crew. We put 18 local teens to work (at minimum wage) on a wide variety of tasks—largely maintenance, like mowing and fence repair, but also, most exciting, constructing buildings. I have designed and together we've built a market stand, pizza pavilion (sheltering a wood-fired oven), and nature center, all timber frames.

Our most recent project this summer: a timber frame to shelter a Clivus New England composting toilet ([www.clivusmultrum.com](http://www.clivusmultrum.com)). NCOF received a grant from the Sudbury Foundation *et al.* for the full cost of the Clivus system, which comes complete with a building. Wanting to stay in sync with our other structures, especially the barn, I proposed that the teens and I make our own toilet building. The good people at Clivus were flexible, allowing us to purchase their entire kit save the building.

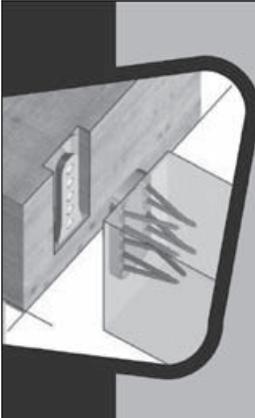
I based the design for the frame on Peter Henrikson's bread oven model featured in the Guild's book *Fourteen Small Timber Frames*. Many of the building materials came about in my favorite fashion: mysterious, timely



Jackie Melchiorri

*Assembled frame plus Mark Oteri, left, and some of the team.*

serendipity. One after another, needed materials presented themselves. Logs donated by my landlord: hemlock culled due to the dreaded woolly adelgid infestation and windfall white pine (milled on site by a local Wood Mizer owner). Salvaged flagstone for a stunning floor; salute to Rob Hadden! Brand new cedar clapboards from the dumpster. Reclaimed slate roof shingles from a



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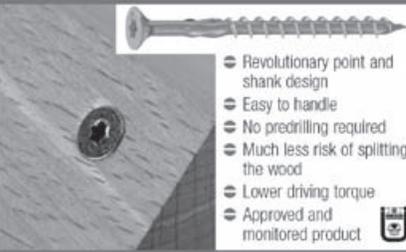
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## Sugar shack—TFG regional meeting?

I AM inspired by Laurie Smith and his gardener's shelter project as well as the Holder Bros. and their small, regional Guild gathering. Together they spawned an idea.

The NCOF could use a new sugar shack. We tap roughly 250 sugar maples every February. The 13,000 gallons of sap collected are boiled down to produce up to 300 gallons of maple syrup.

The present building, a stick frame, has served us well for 25 years, but it was brought from another site, was plunked directly on the earth, and has been composting itself ever since. Its dimensions are 24 x 16 ft., and the new building would have to be about the same size.

This idea is in a fledgling stage, so who knows how it will look? My initial vision for the project is as a mini-rendezvous-type regional gathering. We could use geometrical design to lay out the frame and hand tools to cut it. We could raise the frame on a dry-stone foundation built by my brother Matt and me. The roof would likely be steel, maybe slate, for fire resistance.

Your ideas, input, cautions, and so on are more than welcome. Further, I am open to partnering with you for inspiration, planning, energy, and logistics. Right after Labor Day of 2010 is our favored time for this project and, fortunately, harvest time too!

Reach me, Mark Oteri, at [mydogmonty@gmail.com](mailto:mydogmonty@gmail.com).  
Thanks!  
—Mark Oteri

neighboring farmstead. Two-ply plastic (translucent but not transparent) left over from greenhouse construction, for odd but practical windows.

Our new toilet (the plan is to use the resulting compost on the cut-flower patch) will nicely augment the developments toward greater sustainability the NCOF has acquired recently: all of the farm's acreage was converted to conservation land, the aforementioned nature center provides a base for wildlife education, and the entire

south slope of the barn roof was fitted with PV panels, supplying half the farm's electricity needs.

We also received a grant for the labor required to make the toilet building. Teen work programs, we have discovered, are fundable even in hard times. In the end we may find ourselves with the coolest, strangest toilet for miles around. Feel free to stop in, judge for yourself and, if nature calls . . . make a contribution.  
—Mark Oteri

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