



This Sure Doesn't Look Like Kansas!



Prickly Mountain: High on Architectural Imagination

More than two decades ago, Prickly Mountain in Warren, Vermont, became known as the site of some of the nation's most interesting architectural exteriors. These recent photos by Joe Sherman show that the area continues to live up to its reputation.

In the mid-1960s the mountain was a mecca for architectural students eager to challenge traditional rules and limitations. Under the leadership of David Sellers and Bill Reineke, students stretched the limits of design without stretching construction budgets. Most of the early structures were vacation homes, although today only the Sibley House (see photo), built in 1966, still serves that function.

The most ambitious building is Dimetrodon (see photo), a project begun in 1970 by three young men who were predicting an energy crisis

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and wanted to find ways to cope with it. Their structure made use of solar and wind energy, with thermal mass provided by a tank holding 12,000 gallons of water. The energy crunch soon materialized, creating an opportunity to field test and modify the innovative energy systems under extreme conditions.

The name Dimetrodon, by the way, refers to a dinosaur with a unique biological heat exchanger that allowed solar heating of its bloodstream. Unlike the dinosaur, however, the building remains in existence and is one of the most unusual condominiums ever designed, housing a community of 17 people.

Compared to some of the early structures, building projects on Prickly Mountain in recent years have leaned more toward the practical. But there is no mistaking the fact that Prickly Mountain originated and evolved in a high spirit of architectural idealism. The photos show only a few of the fascinating, one-of-a-kind exteriors that continue to set Prickly Mountain apart from, say, Levittown—or Kansas.



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