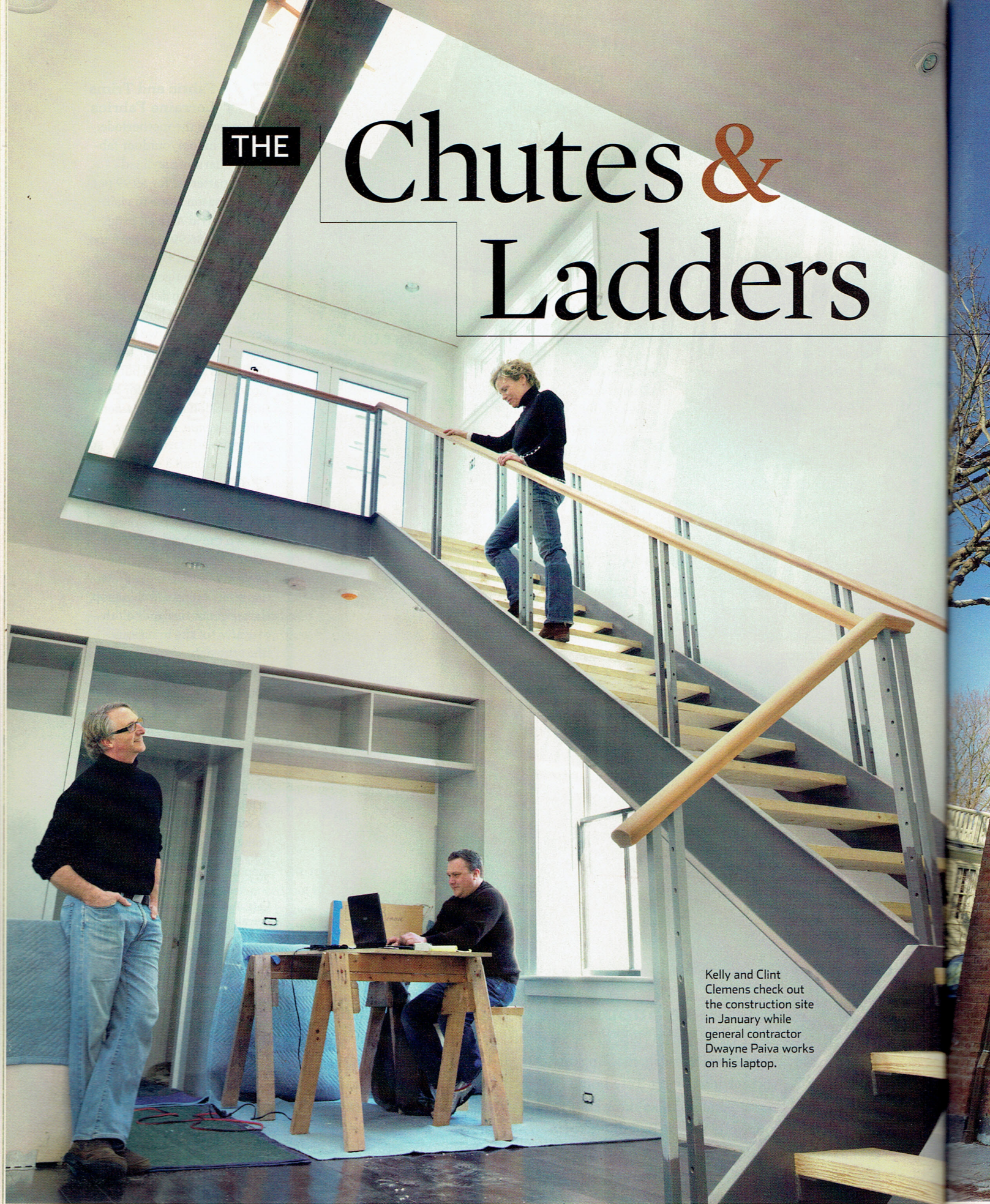


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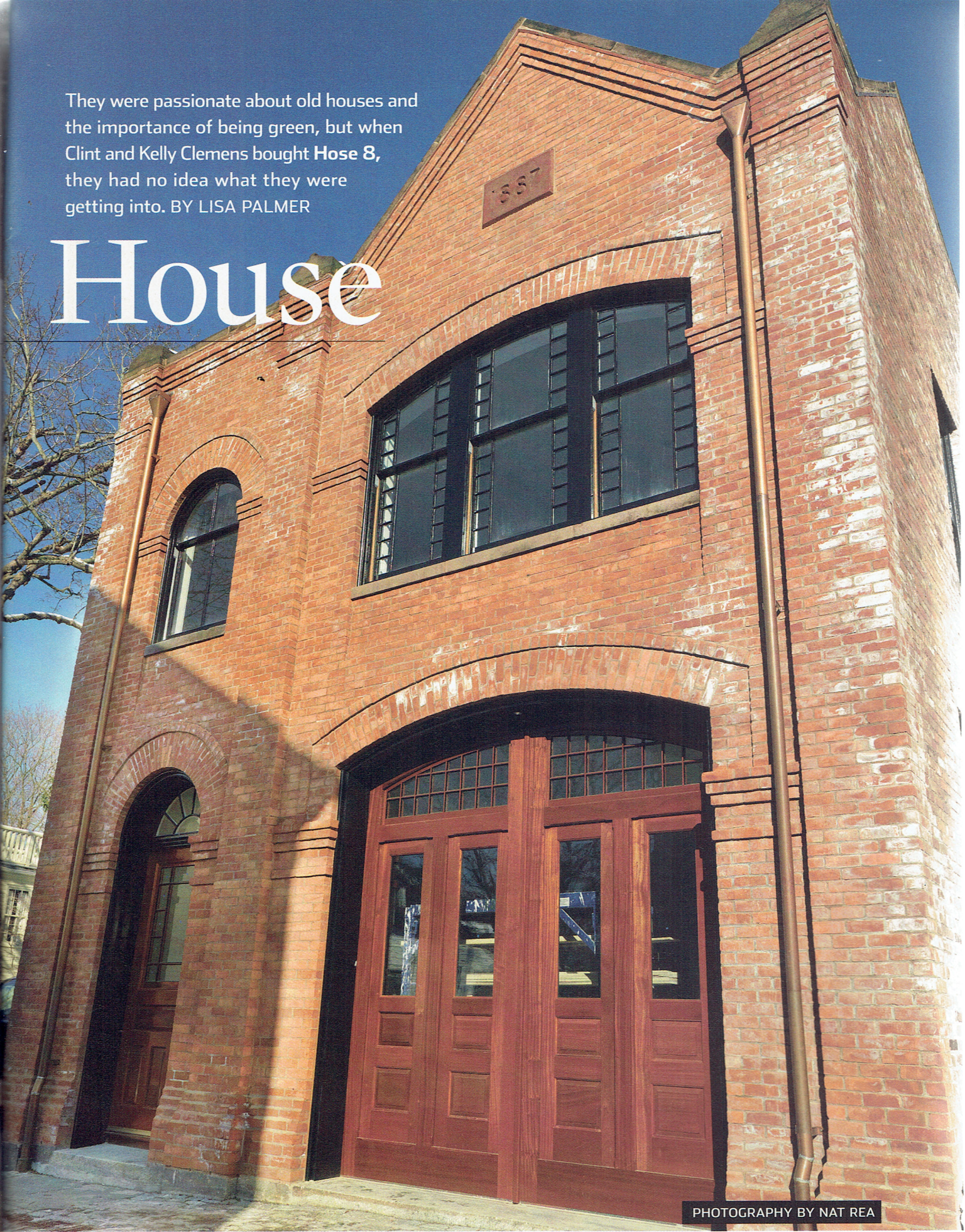
Chutes & Ladders



Kelly and Clint Clemens check out the construction site in January while general contractor Dwayne Paiva works on his laptop.

They were passionate about old houses and the importance of being green, but when Clint and Kelly Clemens bought **Hose 8**, they had no idea what they were getting into. BY LISA PALMER

House



PHOTOGRAPHY BY NAT REA

It was supposed to be a straightforward home renovation, a chance for the couple to

spruce up a triplex and convert it into a single family home. But before darkness fell on their first night at Redwoods Hose Station 8, Clint and Kelly Clemens realized that the road to restoration wouldn't be easy. At all.

The Newport couple spent \$1 million for the nineteenth-century brick structure that dominated its 3,700-square-foot lot. They planned to live in it a few months, even without a functioning kitchen, before they did an overhaul. They moved in on a dreary May day. That night it rained. "Water poured down the interior walls," Kelly says. "It should have been a clue for us. Run!"

Caught off guard, the Clemenses began to sketch remodeling plans that week. That was 2006. They didn't know the renovation would become a rebuild; that it would take on epic proportions. They didn't know their home would become a model of sustainable, green building and energy efficiency. And they didn't know it would take three years before they could move back in.

Clint and Kelly have been married for nineteen years. They are well known among friends for their love of unique houses. Their first residence was an 800-square-foot converted chicken coop at the former home of John Quincy Adams, Red Rail Farm, in Lincoln, Massachusetts. "We had to walk through the barn and paddock to get to the chicken coop," Kelly says. "We must have been crazy in love or just crazy."

For more than ten years they lived on a bluff near Fogland Beach in Tiverton, in a house they had built that was modeled

after a lighthouse. For them, living in architecturally unique houses had become common. So when Hose 8, which dates back to 1887, appeared on the real estate market, they immediately pictured themselves living there.

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IT'S MARCH, AND THE THREE-YEAR RESTORATION IS almost complete. The Clemenses plan to move back into their home on Prospect Hill Street this month, their vision and fortitude rewarded. The former Redwoods Station 8 served as a fire-hose-cart barn for only twenty-five years before it became an upholstery shop and then apartments, a cheek-and-jowl warren of rooms and hallways. The rebuilt Hose 8 is now a private family residence that pays homage to the lofty qualities of the original firehouse. It has become one of Newport's first historic and luxurious green renovations with an almost entirely off-the-grid energy supply and energy-efficient design.

But the road leading the Clemens family to their green home has been taxing. To succeed, they had to cast aside visions of an easy renovation. They had to be super sensitive to the concerns of their neighbors. They needed to deal with building officials, preservationists and the historic district commission, and attend weekly meetings at Town Hall for months. And, after spending five months gutting the building and re-pointing the twelve-inch-thick exterior walls, they had to tear the house down brick by brick and start over when the building inspector decided it was unstable and had to be razed.

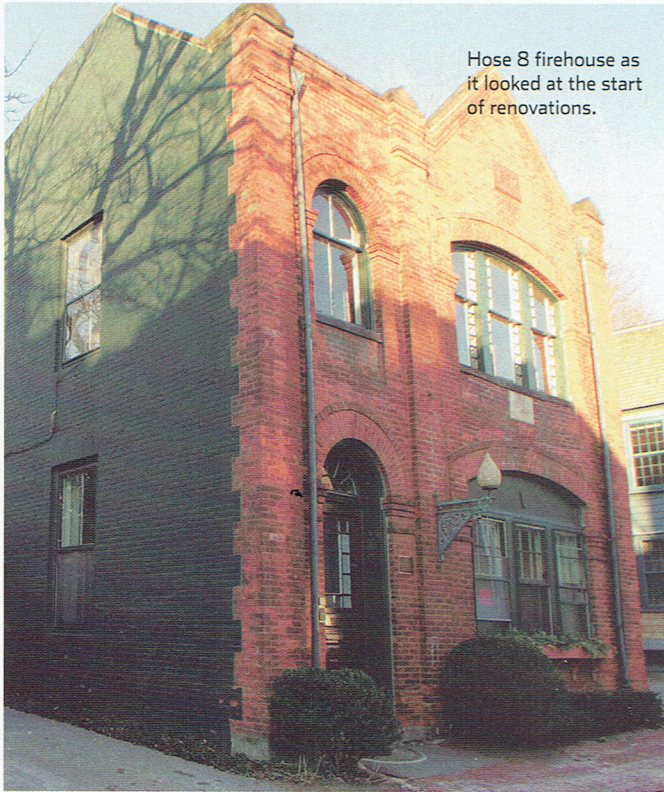
Hose 8 was uncommon, indeed. And, by far, it was their biggest, riskiest undertaking. Clint announces the fateful day the building was reduced to rubble. "July 17, 2007," he says without hesitation. It rolls off his tongue, the moment he stood on scaffolding at the roofline, looked down into the interior of the brick walls, and saw hell. "The mortar was crumbling." Before he knew it, the three-story structure with walls made of three layers of brick, a foot thick, was being dismantled.

"At the end of the day, the question is, should we have even bought a house that should have been condemned?" says Clint, shrugging his shoulders. "Well, we bought it and own it. Now it is our inspiration. I have a great deal of respect for architecture. This firehouse is a masterpiece like an oil painting of a master painter." He wants to return the masterpiece to its glory and then some.

Clint is at once cerebral and expressive. In casual conversation he tends to be a listener, but let him venture onto a subject that truly engages him, such as green building design and sustainable energy, and he becomes Al Gore. At times, he is excited and dreamy, thinking of the future when friends and



HISTORIC PHOTO AND EXTERIOR PHOTO COURTESY CLINT CLEMENS



Hose 8 firehouse as it looked at the start of renovations.

family will visit. He imagines watching Red Sox games on a large screen TV and playing pool with his sons in the game room. At other times he is rattling off figures such as the BTUs of energy his geothermal heating system provides, convincing listeners of its merits. He will run to the cellar to show you the green-tech bowels of his house. He clearly likes knowing the advantages of his uber-energy-efficient set-up, and he has obviously done his research.

Clint stretches a few inches beyond six feet. He possesses equal amounts of leonine self-assurance and laid-back aplomb. He has broad shoulders, and in his flip flops and khaki cargo pants, shaggy hair flopping in the breeze, he has the casual confidence of a surfer hoofing it to the beach with his board. As a boy, his family never owned a house. His father was a Methodist minister and home was the parsonage *du jour*. He eventually moved to Rhode Island, where his father headed up Mathewson Street United Methodist church.

Today, his office is the world: an ocean, the grounds of a Newport mansion, or a plaza in Spain. In these places he works as a director of commercial photography for print and film. His clients range from Mercedes and Land Rover to Prada and Mount Gay Rum. His other office, a home set-up, is a paperless affair. On a digital screen he edits his creations, sharing his work with his clients via the Internet in a virtual world.

If one word could describe Clint it is speed. He's constantly moving. When he's not biking, he's boating. When he's not flying to distant

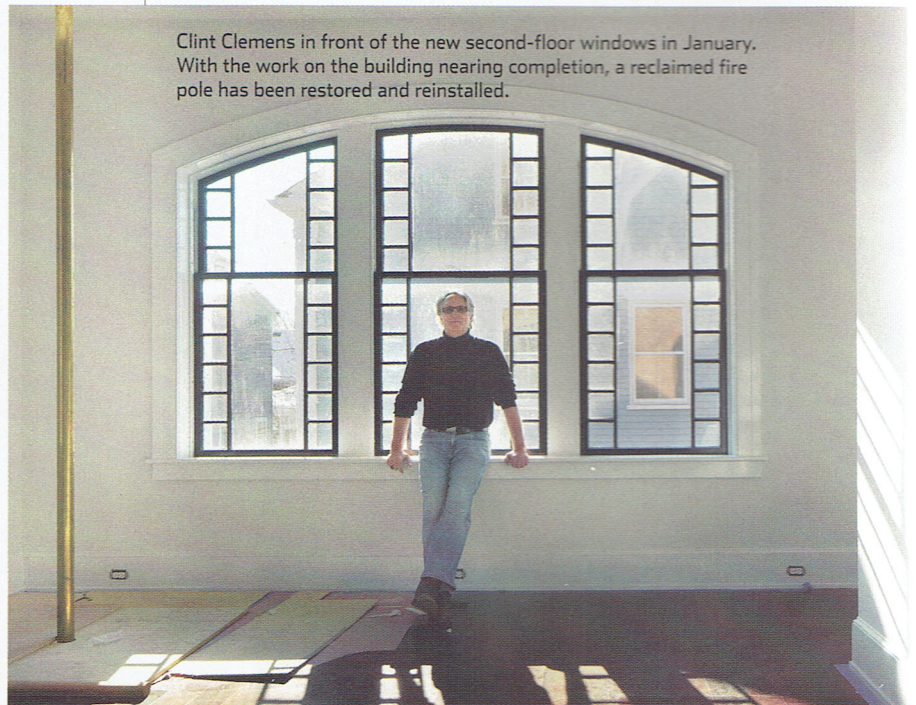
lands for work, he's windsurfing. When he's not photographing the newest prototype sports car, he's creating films of cars moving lightning fast with his proprietary, computer-generated imagery. And when he's not doing anything special, he's hatching his next plan.

Kelly is the serene and structured one in the partnership. She'll tell you that Clint's feverish pace in work and life is astonishing. "I think our marriage works because I know how to hold on and go along for the ride," she says, laughing. She is petite, with a halo of blond hair, but her size belies her power. She commands a room. She has worked as a producer for print and film production, which is how she met Clint. She is a mother and an artist, and in her free time volunteers at a group home of Child and Family Services of Newport County. She laughs a lot and often at herself.

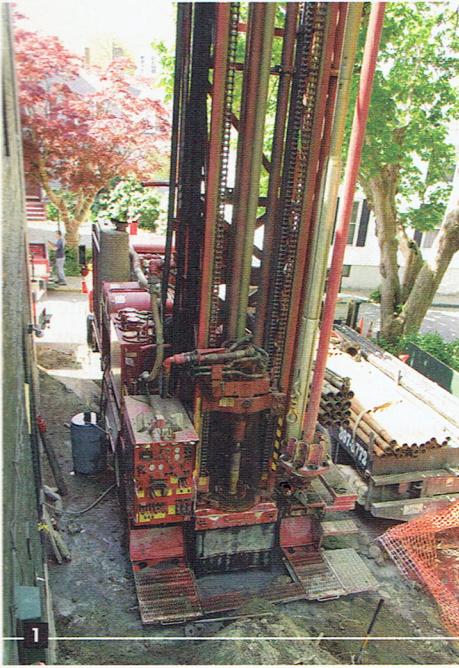
With Clint and Kelly's shared passion for artistic ventures achieved at a quick pace, as any commercial production requires, both admit the strain of this renovation-tested eternal optimism. The Hose 8 project began as a simple home renovation where they hoped to welcome extended family from far-flung places to enjoy all that Newport offers. It turned out to be an exercise in fortitude.

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IT WAS A WARM EVENING IN LATE SUMMER OF 2006 when Sam, Clint's son from a previous marriage, posed an ethical question to his father. The two were walking home from seeing *An Inconvenient Truth* at the Jane Pickens Theater. As they crossed over the threshold of old Hose 8, still in its pre-renovated state, they debated Gore's message in the movie: "I don't really consider this a political issue; I consider it to be a moral issue." That's when Sam challenged his father: What are **Story continues on page 84. Photos continue on page 50.**



Clint Clemens in front of the new second-floor windows in January. With the work on the building nearing completion, a reclaimed fire pole has been restored and reinstalled.



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BRICK BY BRICK

An abbreviated visual history of Hose 8's rebirth.

1 Drilling the 800-foot-deep geothermal well, which will cool and heat the 5,000-square-foot house.

2 Contractors install new interior framing tied to the old foundation and existing brick shell of the fire house.

3 While repairing cracks and other structural problems, workers discovered that the original mortar gluing the old bricks together had lost its bonding power. The turn-of-the-century

mortar had been made with beach sand, which disintegrates over time.

4 25,000 of the bricks are carefully disassembled, cleaned, labeled and stored in the new basement.

5 The crew from ESHI Construction stands on top of the new concrete foundation, which was built inside the old stone one. A system of floor joists and large bolts ties into the foundation, resulting in an ultra-strong struc-

ture. Thick steel plates (visible in front of the crew) transfer the weight of the building to the new foundation, bypassing the old one.

6 Masons reconstruct the brick walls, preserving most of the original details. Four windows were saved for the restored firehouse; the rest are replicas.

7 One of the few exterior changes was a huge new copper skylight, which illuminates the top two floors of the house.



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