

# ultimate northwest

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## Get off the grid

A Salem architect  
designs self-sufficient  
(and beautiful) homes p42

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the  
FUTURE-PROOF  
home

BY JEFF KUECHLE PHOTOS BY NATHAN GOOD

"Flooded with natural light and shielded from the fierce tropical sun by thick masonry walls and broad eaves, this Nathan Good-designed artist's home in Mulege, Mexico draws electricity from the sun and water from the surrounding landscape."



raumatized by an Iron Curtain childhood, fearful of a future shadowed by global warming-fueled environmental catastrophe, the client came to architect Nathan Good with an unusual request.

“She had bought some property near Mount Rainier, and she asked me to design a home that could withstand anything — sustained winds of 150 mph, a forest fire, marauding bands of thieves,” says Good, a Salem-based architect. “She wanted it to be off the grid, energy-independent, with a safe room where she could live up to two weeks without needing anything from outside. She was afraid global warming was going to cause natural disasters in the Northwest. She wanted me to design a home that was ‘future-proof.’ ”

The client came to Good because he was among Pacific Northwest residential architects pioneering the “self-sufficient land boat” concept: the ultimate getaway home, drawing power from the sun and water from the surrounding environment, capable of generating its own heat, light, hot water, drinking water, even food, in some of the most rugged and remote off-

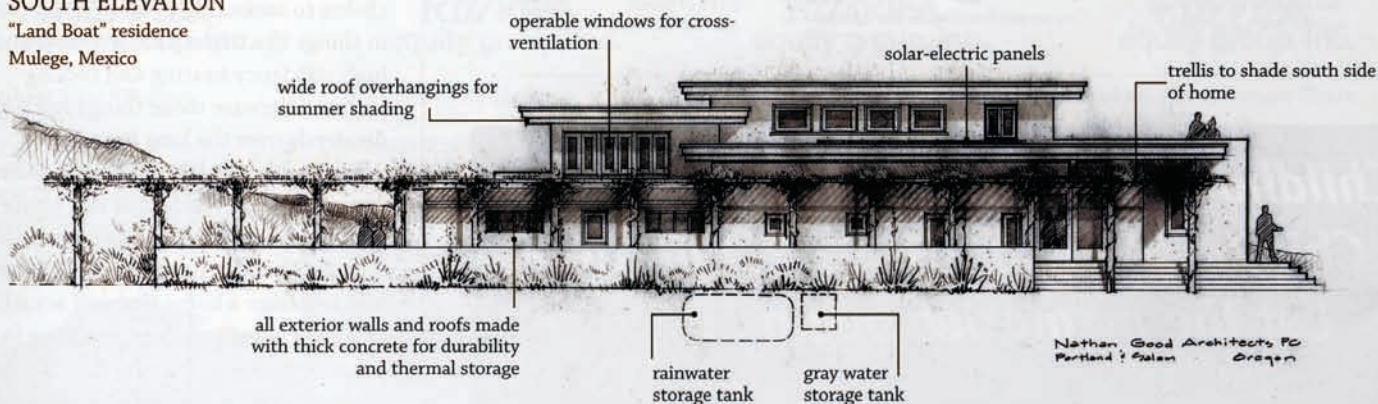
the-grid settings imaginable.

A few years ago, another client asked Good to design a small home in Cannon Beach, capable of generating as much electricity as it consumed and withstanding gale-force winds, an earthquake, fire and the famously inclement weather on the northern Oregon coast. Good’s design managed to achieve all of these mechani-

cal goals while retaining beautiful livability. The resulting structure, a masterpiece of curving cedar and stone surfaces, hand-hewn beams and ethereal open space, was chosen as the 2005 Custom Green Home of the Year by the National Association of Home Builders and also received a Sunset/American Institute of Architects Western Home Award in 2006. »

**SOUTH ELEVATION**

“Land Boat” residence  
Mulege, Mexico



**FEATURES**

While Good has built “land boats” in climates ranging from the mountains of Alaska to the high desert of Colorado to the beaches of Mexico, all of his designs share a number of common features:

- The smallest possible footprint
- High-efficiency lighting
- Appliances and HVAC systems
- An ultra-high-efficiency building shell to minimize energy use
- The use of natural light (and, in warmer climates, shade-producing projecting eaves and natural ventilation) to the maximum extent feasible.

**POWER**

Power is supplied by photovoltaic panel arrays on the roof of the home. Electrical requirements vary depending on the interior amenities of the home, but a typical 2,000-square-foot Good design can achieve energy neutrality with a system costing about \$20,000 (often reduced to less than \$5,000 through tax credits, rebates and other government incentives).

**PLANNING**

“The first thing we do is a thorough site assessment — we take into account annual rainfall, prevailing winds, annual temperatures, the path of the sun across the site, the skill level of the local builders,” Good says. “Then we sit down with the clients to help them understand what it means to create a sustainable home with a smaller footprint. Do they really need a pool table? Do they need an indoor pool?”

Good’s Colorado client, who wanted a net-zero home (one that produces as much energy as it consumes) built off the grid in the serene high desert, did need an indoor pool. Good turned it into a passive-solar greenhouse whose humidity and warmth would make the rest of the home more comfortable.

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Another Good design, built near Mulege on Mexico's Baja Peninsula, was created in a rainy environs opposite: a hot, dry climate that receives only 3 to 4 inches of precipitation a year. He designed a home with a staggered roof-line and overhanging eaves to provide shade during the heat of the day, large windows that open to admit cooling morning and evening breezes, 100 percent on-site electrical generation, rainwater harvest and gray water re-use systems.

"It's like putting together a puzzle," Good says about the process of designing within the land boat aesthetic. "All of the pieces have to fit together if you're going to achieve true net-zero energy independence. I encourage my clients to make the investment up front in things like triple-pane windows and high-efficiency heating and cooling systems, because those things will pay dividends over the long term."

Even with a widely publicized downturn in the U.S. residential real estate market, demand for Good's creations is growing. One Portland client has asked him to design a home that will actually be a net energy producer, resulting in a monthly payment from, rather than to, the local electric utility. Good recently opened a Portland office to keep up with his increased workload.

"We have a lot of wonderful clients and projects right now — some commercial, but mostly residential," Good says. "We definitely have good fortune shining on us."



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