

Heilman at the Topia Inn (below), and performing with Thomas Patrick in Paul Taylor's *EVENTIDE*.



Caryn Heilman INN OWNER

After dancer **Caryn Heilman** left the Paul Taylor Dance Company in 1999, she and her partner, musician Nana Simopoulos, dreamed of creating a hub of arts and education in their small Berkshire community. Their vision: produce multimedia music and dance works on a grand New York City scale and house the artists and patrons who traveled from near and far—all while being ecologically conscious. Ten years of touring with the Taylor Company had given Heilman a broad perspective about community, people and places—experience she felt prepared her well for a thriving career in hospitality.

In 2004, with a commitment of support from the town, the two purchased an old vaudeville theater that had been abandoned for 40 years. Famed theater designer Robert Long (along with local architect Dana Bixby) signed on to use the latest technologies in sustainability to create a state-of-the-art theater (seating up to 500) that would operate with a minimal carbon footprint.

As their nonprofit Topia Arts Center began to take shape, Heilman and Simopoulos noted the lack of lodging in the immediate vicinity and began to transform a second building into an ecologically sustainable bed and breakfast inn. On July 7, 2007, the same day that former Vice President Al Gore launched his monumental *Live Earth* concert, the two opened the Topia Inn, in Adams, MA, the “best green-friendly stay” in the Berkshires (*Yankee Magazine*, 2009).

Having seen the inside of countless hotel rooms, Heilman had definite ideas about what she wanted for her inn. Proving it is possible to be simultaneously green and luxurious, the 10 themed rooms (Aloha, Zen, Moroccan...) are beautifully designed by fellow artists and musicians. Linens, furniture and furnishings are all recycled or made from organic, sustainably harvested or restored materials. (The building’s insulation is made out of old blue jeans!) Both beds and breakfast are organic. Guests are provided with nontoxic bath and body-care products, which can also be purchased from the inn’s “green” store.

With the help of a staff of one, Heilman and Simopoulos lovingly run the eco-inn themselves. They are environmental educators, tour guides, cooks, and housekeepers. They enjoy meeting new people and sharing their passion for ecology. And don’t forget, they are practicing artists who also happen to be renovating an entire theater, literally with hammer and nails in hand. “As a dancer, I am used to physical labor,” says Heilman. “I approach everything as an artist. I see the larger picture and know the unwavering dedication, and sweat it takes to reach a goal.

“Paul [Taylor] taught me about the power of relational structures not only in choreography,” she says. “I believe it is possible to inspire a community through movement.”

—Rachel Berman

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