

relocation

Ahead of Their *Time*

Aspects of the green building movement that's gaining steam worldwide have already been in practice in Bermuda for centuries. As a rule, islands are not rich in resources, inspiring island residents themselves to be resourceful.



Windsor House - Bermuda

Perhaps the best example of the greening trend meeting a centuries-old way of life in Bermuda can be found in cisterns—where rainwater gathered from rooftops is stored under or adjacent to private homes.

Bermudians are also welcoming newer green technologies like solar panels; the trick is how to incorporate the panels into the island's traditional stepped white roof.

"Bermuda roofs have always been a beautiful part of the style of architecture here," says OBMI's Bermuda Regional Director Colin Campbell. "There's an evolution of the style as far as how to wrap the aesthetic into the technology, which is quite interesting indeed."

Another global trend with a nod toward self-sufficiency that's being adopted in Bermuda is the notion of the personal garden. Clients are shying away from taking full advantage of their property's buildable area in favor of retaining a natural landscape whose benefits are myriad. A cleverly designed landscape provides a privacy buffer and welcomes birds, butterflies, and other fauna that enrich one's time at home. Undeveloped space also allows for the growing of fruits, vegetables, and herbs.

"Discerning clients of ours have asked for herb gardens outside the kitchen, so in the busy life everyone's leading, you can actually step out your back door and grab some thyme or rosemary and add that to your meal," says Colin. "That's the new Bermuda style—it goes beyond form and function to the ethos of good health,

coming to terms with your surroundings, and being grateful for those surroundings."

OBMI can trace the amalgamation of structure and landscape back to its origins; founder Wilfred Onions himself was a keen gardener. No stranger to being ahead of his time, Wilfred's style, developed during his time in Europe in the early 1930s, when the modernist movement was at its peak, can still be seen in Bermuda's iconic architecture today. His combination of modernist elements with the traditional Bermuda cottage evolved as a response to the mass-produced "little boxes made of ticky-tacky," as the song goes, that were appearing across America.

"By the mid-1950s, Wilfred and his founding partner, Valmer Bouchard, had struck the look of the Bermuda style," says Colin. "It was not overly fussy. Their designs had a classic Bermuda look but were modern in the layout. They were ahead of their time by a long shot, but they were also of their time. He and his colleagues wanted to keep the context of Bermuda whole and relevant, and that's sort of carried through today."

One element of Bermudian architecture that's continued through the ages is the use of the island's own native stone as a structural element, which today stands alongside more modern materials like concrete block, steel, and glass. When building in Bermuda, however, one can't consider style alone. The hurricanes that sweep across the island require structures to be strong enough to withstand their winds, and the island's humid environment, made even more challenging by the salty air coming off the surrounding

oceans, can destroy modern elements like steel at an alarmingly fast rate.

"There are a number of systems coming along that work in our environment, like insulated concrete forms, which have a foam exterior and solid concrete core," says Colin. "While the material is not less expensive than traditional means of building, it assembles faster, meaning you get your structure delivered at a faster rate. We may see a shift to that option."

As OBMI's business expands both in Bermuda and around the world, the architecture firm's reach is broadening to the Middle East and Africa. With the expansion to these new frontiers, OBMI also continues to cultivate its Caribbean roots with the development of the Half Moon Bay Resort project in Antigua.

Now in its 80th year in business, OBMI looks back on—and continues to rely on—the foresight of its founders, Wilfred Onions and Valmer Bouchard. The firm continues with its charge to build future history by designing projects that possess a unique identity while reflecting the spirit of the local community.

"The essence of OBMI has been the application of modern technologies within the context of the communities they're in," says Colin. "What we started with right from the get-go continues to be reinforced in the next generation. We're not 80 years old; we're 80 years wise."

OBMI

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