

BY ROE OSBORN



No Chance of Showers

As I write this, an icy northwest gale sweeps off of Cape Cod Bay, finding its way through every open nail hole and crevice in this tiny cottage built before anyone ever even dreamed of air-sealing. I shiver under many layers of clothing, but it's not the warm summers or the sunny beaches of the Cape that I long for on this winter day—it's my outdoor shower.

While outdoor showers are common in many locales around the country, Cape Cod is the only place I know where residents bravely—and maybe insanely—use them as their primary shower for much, if not all, of the year. My own humble stockade-fence shower is plumbed with garden hose connected to the least expensive shower apparatus available. I commission it each year on the first day of baseball season—my way of underscoring the hope of spring. Then I use it consistently until the first hard freeze in the fall. This year, that sad day fell on the Monday before Thanksgiving.

I won't try to describe the blissful exhilaration I feel under the warm shower surrounded by whatever air Mother Nature happens to bestow on the day, but I understand and live the obsession that so many Cape Codders feel about showering outdoors. To satisfy that obsession, Cape Codders have taken the design and building of outdoor showers to an art form, both in new construction and remodeling. And I've found that if the home is more elaborate, the outdoor shower usually follows suit.

In my 11-year tenure on the Cape, I've been lucky enough to photograph scores of homes and dozens of outdoor showers. Decorative shapes carved into the boards are common, and waves are a familiar theme (1). The showers themselves can assume many different sizes and shapes including trapezoids, triangles, and even the occasional cylinder (2).

The actual water delivery system can vary quite a bit. I've seen a garden nozzle used as a showerhead, but I've also seen incredibly elaborate full-body shower systems with rainfall showerheads (3).

Materials in outdoor showers can also differ from one shower to the next. Besides the typical vertical wood boards, fencing made from PVC is becoming more and more common, and I've seen every type of material from corrugated metal to glass block (4). Never underestimate a Cape Codder's ingenuity when it comes to building a unique outdoor shower.

So I wait here impatiently in the snug confines of this cottage as the days lengthen and sun's light melts the snow and warms the earth. Fenway Park opens on April 3 this year, but for now I can only dream of venturing out on that day to officially kick off another season.

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Photos by Roe Osborn