

STATE OF THE ARTS ... ARTS OF THE STATE ...



Pendleton inventor Vic Cook built his 257-foot-long home (left) entirely from materials found on the site. The project is intended for artistic, environmental, and ethical contemplation. Photo by Carole Carlson.

architecture

The Giant

BY CAROLE CARLSON

Vic Cook of Pendleton is fulfilling a goal he set for himself more than ten years ago: to build a state-of-the-art environmental home with his own two hands and "to fill it with as much science as I possibly can."

In doing so, he created a work of art.

"But most art is not functional; it's just decorative," he insists.

Designer-composer-musician-teacher Vic Cook has created his own version of the world as it ought to be in this day of high-priced oil and high-level confusion. Everything in his house, called "the Giant," is in balance with nature.

It's almost totally solar-powered throughout—from wood lathe to electronics to lighting—with Delco Remy batteries provided by General Motors. And it isn't just a prototype or working model. Set deep in the woods next to Pendleton's Fall Creek, it's Cook's full-time home.

Look around as you enter. And listen, too, because Cook's music is usually pouring out of the sophisticated electronic music system in the Giant's recording studio.

Running in a steady stream from front to back in the 257-foot-long Giant are:

—an entrance area featuring a fieldstone beehive fireplace and original oil paintings by Cook's father, artist Frank Cook. One of Vic Cook's primary reasons for building the house was to display his father's work properly.

—a small stage where some of Vic's musical equipment and acoustic guitars are in place and ready for use. In the loft above, he composes and programs his music. You reach the loft by climbing thick slab steps wound around a sturdy tree trunk.

—beyond the stage, a huge kitchen-dining room with more of his father's paintings, woodburning stoves, running water, and an environmentally controlled "refrigerator" made from a tree trunk.

—and finally, up three steps, down the stone-floored hallway, and past the rustic-looking but modernly equipped bathroom, Vic's workroom-bedroom. There on the plain wooden draftsman's table he made himself, Cook works on his original designs, including an energy-saving car he's sure will free Americans from the need for Middle Eastern oil. As soon as he has the financial

A woodburning stove (right) will help heat Cook's environmentally conscious home this winter. All photos by Carole Carlson.



backing, he'll enlarge the table and build a working model of the car there.

Cook says he's always liked working from models in his projects. He had one for the Giant, and he hopes to build a solar-powered model of it for exhibition. The traveling model would show everyone just how his experimental house functions.

Cook is a teacher. (Formerly a musician with his own small professional group, he earns his only steady income now by giving guitar lessons.) He knows the value of teaching others how to live energy-efficient lives. "If we don't teach the next generation something about living in harmony with our planet, it's gone," he says.

He opens his doors to all groups and individuals, but is especially pleased when school classes and scout troops come. The principal of Madison Heights High School in Anderson calls the Giant "a fascinating thing for young people to see" and arranges mass tours for his incoming freshmen each fall.

If Cook has created the Giant as a work of art, he is also sending a message through it. He tells his visitors, "All the information I needed for building this house with my own two hands I learned in high school and from reading books. . . . It's important that you dream, and it's OK to be different. . . . Live life the way you see it instead of being molded by society."

Cook is developing other dreams. He's written a screenplay for a musical fantasy about Mother Nature coming to life. The music "breaks new ground from a choral standpoint," he says. "The key changes were unheard of five years ago. [With the new technology] I can write a whole symphony and do a printout of it. I like to write a lush style for multiple instruments, then do an overlay of jazz style."

He has also written the music for an eighty-laser show to be presented at the Giant. And he's working with WISH-TV Channel 8 in Indianapolis on a special about his house that could be shown all over the country.

But his plans have expanded beyond anything he anticipated. Sitting under the mellow solar-powered lights that line the high walls of his house, he sums it up: "When I started this thing ten years ago, I hoped it would give me a place to live and help my creative endeavors. But I'm trying to go a step further than just being creative. A million people are getting ready to die, all over oil, so we can be wasteful with energy."

Not if Vic Cook has anything to say about it. ○

Carole Carlson was for twelve years a feature writer and editor for the Herald Bulletin in Anderson.