

Environment East Builds Reputation On the North Fork

By SALLY CRANE

ALL OVER THE east end of Long Island, and wherever people spend as much time and money on their homes as they do here, homeowners are turning to construction companies which stress quality work and careful attention to detail. In particular, the rehabilitation and reconstruction of old houses, which has become a near-mantra on the South Fork, is creating a demand for this kind of work. While the need in the Hamptons is being filled by a number of new construction operations, on the North Fork, one company stands out. More and more often, one sees the bright yellow Environment East sign propped up against homes of all varieties and description.

Only five years old, Environment East,

concentration is between Riverhead and Orient. Stoutenburgh says that the need for what Environment East offers is so great on the North Fork that he hasn't had time to extend the operation to the South Fork.

"I do most of my own design," says Stoutenburgh, who adds that he also works with architects, supplying on-site supervision and design construction. His familiarity with all phases of construction is enhanced by his artistic background, he suggests, claiming that he considers himself more of a photographer than a builder. As the offspring of journalist Paul Stoutenburgh, whom his son calls "the consciousness of the North Fork," Peter Stoutenburgh looks back on his upbringing as a creative one. Raised in Cutchogue, Stoutenburgh traveled extensively and later attended colleges in Colorado and Utah. His working relation-

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which is based in Peconic, now employs 12 full-time workers as well as part-time and office employees, making it the largest construction employer on the North Fork, claims owner Peter Stoutenburgh. He attributes the success of his operation not only to quality work, but to the diversity of services it offers. He also maintains that guaranteed reliability and personalized work have contributed to the company's success as well as Environment East's emphasis on long-term relationships with clients.

Stoutenburgh says his first objective in starting the company was to offer quality services to homeowners. At the inception, he thought that Environment East offered the most exceptional materials and workmanship and therefore should cost more. "I came to realize," he says, "that, though that was the case, it doesn't have to be expensive." Now, says Stoutenburgh, "we work for the biggest estates on the North Fork and we deal with my neighbors or relatives. For the product we give, we're more than reasonably priced," he claims.

While Stoutenburgh has apparently managed to avoid the prima donna pitfall, he has retained a sense of selectivity, occasionally turning down a project which involves low-quality materials or a client who wants him to rush the job faster than quality work would allow. At the same time, the extent of the Environment East operation permits four or five major projects, as well as a dozen or so minor ones, to be underway at once, says Stoutenburgh. "Quite often there will be two or three Environment East trucks on the same road," he adds.

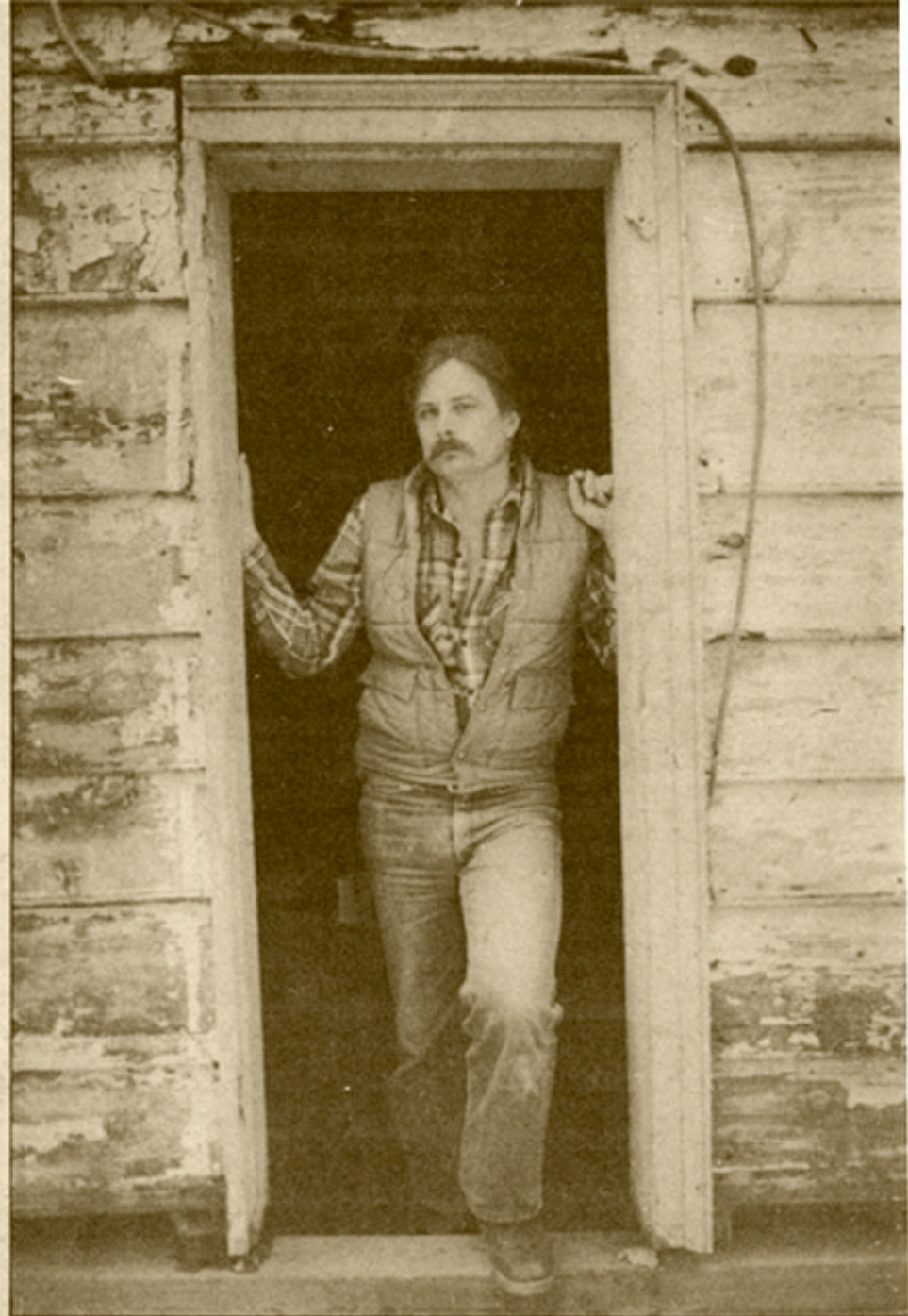
Of all the work handled by the company, 75 percent is concentrated between Mattituck and Greenport, and the main

ships with clients on the North Fork began in high school when he did landscaping in the area, leading to other, occasional odd jobs over the years. After the formation of Environment East, Stoutenburgh claims he "lost his hammer," and now he concentrates mainly on supervising projects.

Environment East has become as diversified, he says, as have the people on the North Fork. "People are now being attracted here from all sorts of backgrounds," says Stoutenburgh, who tries to cater to everyone's needs. The company now serves local churches, farmers and businesses, as well as private residences. In addition to rehabilitation work, for which the company is best known, Environment East is doing more and more new construction and working on contemporary reconstruction.

An example of contemporary reconstruction is going on in Southold where a house which is only around 35 years old is being redone "from the inside to the out." The single-story shingle house has been gutted inside and the rooms turned into open, clear spaces, creating a lighter, more airy look. Detail work is now being added, such as the installation of antique fan lights which the owners salvaged from a wrecking company. The floors, French doors, other windows and ceiling have already been completed, and now the construction crew is adding built-in conveniences. About the only thing Environment East does not do is major masonry, plumbing and electrical work, although Stoutenburgh will oversee those facets.

Rehabilitation projects can vary from full-scale restoration of decrepit older houses to the simple addition of traditional features. Stoutenburgh bought a



After only five years in business, Peter Stoutenburgh, top, now employs more construction workers at Environment East than any other North Fork builder. The company, best known for its rehabilitation work, is making this 1655 structure livable without sacrificing authenticity.

house dating from the 17th Century last year and is now working on remodeling it. The two-story shingle cottage features original beams in the ceilings, as well as the old-fashioned, central brick fireplace and steep, narrow staircase. Work is now underway to provide a foundation.

Environment East recently redid the chimneys on a large old house in

Southold, a project which most of today's construction companies are apparently incapable of.

Stoutenburgh says he is careful about the people he hires to work on the crews. Of prime importance are qualities of responsibility and trustworthiness, as well as amiability. Stoutenburgh sees the com-

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