

# The modern riddle of sun, wind, and water...

# THE HARD EDGE

## The Review

by Wynne Thomas  
Drawings by Huntley Brown

At Spry Point, a scenic headland on the windswept eastern shore of Prince Edward Island, stands the Ark, an attempt at a tangible expression of one of Canada's more intangible concepts - the "conservator society".

A functional combination of solar-heated home and greenhouse, the Ark was conceived four years ago as the country's first "bio-shelter". It was designed to pioneer living techniques appropriate to the new kind of society that has been advocated by various organizations and individuals as the life-style to which Canadians should aspire.

Although the term "conservator society" is now more than five years old, the time that has elapsed since it was coined has tended to obscure rather than illuminate its definition. Indeed, it appears that some people, after the fashion of Humpty Dumpty, would have it mean anything they choose it to mean. "Its appeal", the federal ministry of science and technology noted in a recent document, "lies in that it easily lends itself to meaning many things to many people."

Thus, some see the conservator society, as a necessary and, indeed, inevitable adjustment by Canadians to a future that is likely to be characterized by a diminishing and increasingly expensive supply of natural resources, notably energy. But others view it in a context of more radical social change. To such people the conservator society represents a renunciation of the industrial state as we know it today and a return to a way of life less dominated by modern technology. The proponents of this interpretation envisage a society in which man lives in affinity with nature, abandoning what some regard as the ego-system in favour of the ecosystem.

The term "conservator society" is a Canadian invention. It was first used by the Science Council of Canada in January, 1973, in a report on natural resources policy in which the council urged the need for new institutions to protect and control resource development in Canada. Two years later, when the term was beginning to creep into general usage, the council addressed itself somewhat belatedly to the task of defining what it meant. It came up with the following provisional definition:

"The concept of a conservator society arises from a deep concern for the future, and the realization that decisions taken today, in such areas as energy and resources, may have irreversible and possibly destructive impacts in the medium to long term. The necessity for a conservator society follows from our perception of the world as a finite host to humanity, and from our recognition of increasing global interdependence."

Other definitions of the conservator society have been advanced that imply varying degrees of social,

economic, and political change. However, the concept of "doing more with less", particularly in the use of energy, is either implicit or explicit in nearly all of them. This focus on energy is understandable. Not only does it fuel today's industrial economy but, in one form or another, it is an essential ingredient of any conceivable future society, regardless of whether it be industrial or pastoral.

Concerning energy, however, two distinct and mutually exclusive schools of thought have emerged. The first recognizes the desirability and, eventually, the inevitability of Canada's becoming heavily dependent on renewable resources, such as sun, water, wind, and biomass for its energy requirements. However, it believes that for the transitional period we have no option but to depend on our remaining nonrenewable resources and, indeed, that we will have to find more of them, especially oil and gas, to tide us over until renewables become a practical reality.

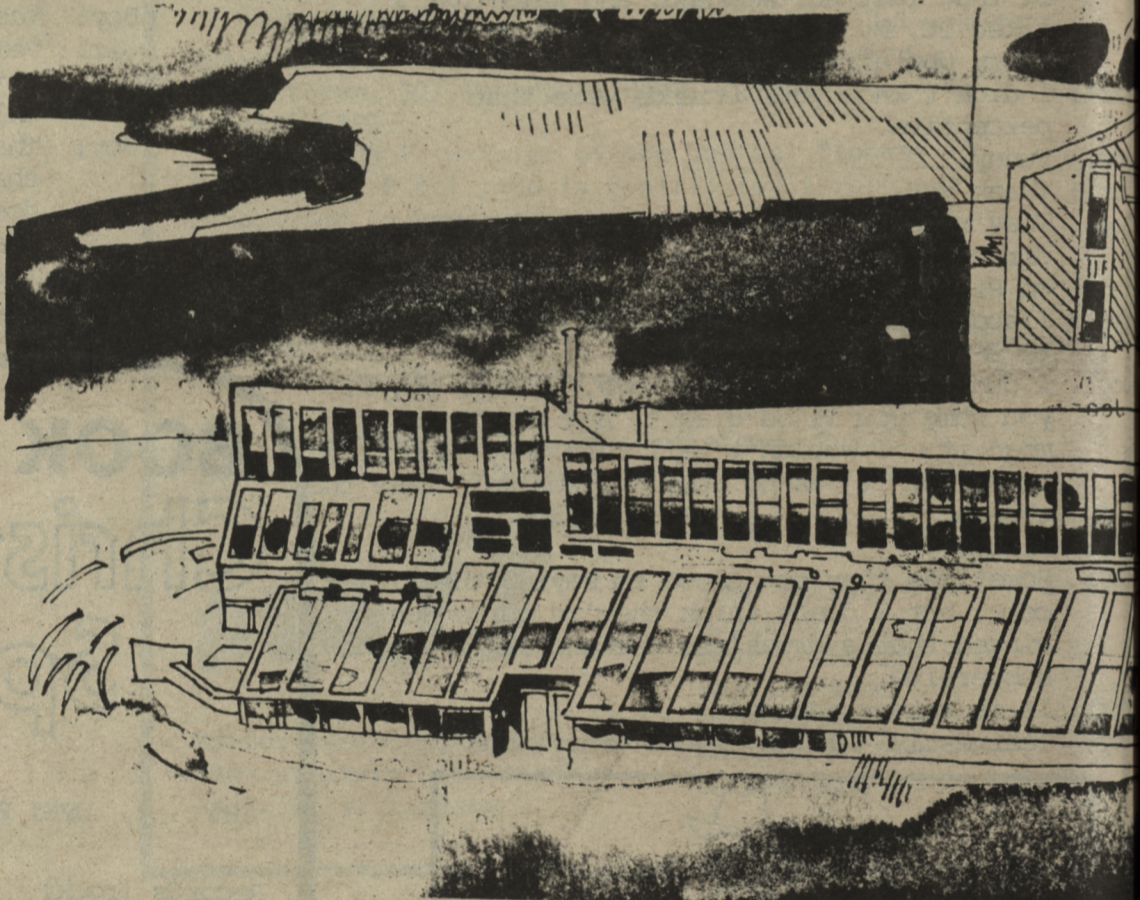
This view of energy development, of course, is not confined to such advocates of the conservator society. It is espoused by, among others, Canada's energy industry and the federal and provincial governments. Its validity is also recognized by the Science Council. The authors

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For its bold and Edward Island, the organization dedicated renewable technology maximum reliance

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The Ark was designed as a self-contained living unit, where people could use renewable energy in the

of the council's report on *Canada as a Conservator Society* urge a "preference for sources such as hydro, solar, wind, and vegetation", but warn that this is a long-term goal. "In this century", they write, "the contribution from renewable energy will probably not exceed 15 to 20 percent of total energy supply. Until these renewable resources become firmly established and provide a major share, present plans to open and develop new supplies of fossil fuels and electricity will have to continue..."

The other school of thought, exemplified in a now-famous monograph by the British physicist Amory Lovins, holds that any continued dependence on fossil fuels and other high-technology sources of energy is undesirable and unnecessary, both socially and economically. Subscribers to this view claim that the "soft" technology required to develop renewable energy is well within our grasp, and they believe that countries such as Canada should concentrate their efforts on an immediate switch to renewable resources.

For Canada to turn its back on its hard-won nonrenewable energy technology before deriving all the benefits of that technology seems to many to be about as logical as abandoning the wheel in favour of the fulcrum and the inclined plane. But to some supporters of the conservator society it makes considerable sense. "A soft energy economy", Lovins has written with specific reference to Canada, "is smoothly attainable only if we

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Wood: an important part of our future energy mix?