

2012 HOBI winners showcase local talent

By [Lee Howard](#) Day Staff Writer

Heated shower seats, an ice-melting system for walkways, an outdoor pizza oven and a beach utility room that includes a custom-made surfboard bench are just some of the highlights from the award-winning work last year of local builders.

These examples, culled from the 2012 Home Building Industry Awards, show that local construction firms still know how to complete on a statewide level, builders say. And, despite a relatively slow year for building in Connecticut, local construction firm owners said that by keeping up with the latest industry trends they have managed to carve out a niche for themselves that makes them even more relevant today than ever before.

That's because, according to Nort Wheeler of Mystic River Building Co. in Old Mystic, clients looking to build anew today are seeking ways to recover some of their investment through lower-cost heating and cooling options as well as better insulation.

"They're looking for green technologies to add long-term value," Wheeler said.



Best custom vacation home - Mystic River Building Company.

Wheeler put his philosophy to work at a vacation home he built at the mouth of the Patchogue River in Westbrook that took home a HOBI award. The original home, on a spectacular site overlooking a peninsula, had burned in a fire, and it was Wheeler's job,

along with architect Wayne Garrick, to bring the property back to life.

"The home is absolutely magnificent," Wheeler said. "It's located near a marina, and a parade of boats provides constant entertainment. ... It's almost like your house is in the middle of a marina. ... You can actually fish right off the deck."



The home, which is used as a summer and weekend retreat, features quartz and teak countertops in the kitchen, a Napoleon Crystallo fireplace, a sauna, exercise room, heated shower seats for cold mornings, a heating system to clear snow and ice from walkways and the driveway and a fourth-floor observatory with Mataverde decking and copper roof.

It also includes remote-access technologies that allow lights and the heating system to be turned on and adjusted with the push of a button on a keypad or laptop.