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green SCENE

FAIRHOPE HAS A THRIVING COMMUNITY MARKETPLACE IN WINDMILL MARKET, A HUB OF COMMERCE AND ENTERTAINMENT THAT'S ROOTED IN ECO-FRIENDLY IDEALS.

TEXT BY LINDSAY MOTT



Windmill Market in Fairhope is home to restaurants, a local grocery, a marketplace selling handmade arts and crafts, live music and events, family fun, and more. This community space set inside a metal structure focuses on green initiatives while being unique and award-winning in its design.

Windmill Market is owned by Mac and Gina Walcott, but the pair is involved in many ways. Partners in Walcott Adams Verneville Architects, they designed the building from a vacant metal structure into what you see today. They also own and operate the Sweet Olive Bakery and Café that is located inside the market.

Mac Walcott says they bought the 1960s-era building hoping to move their architecture firm into it, but they realized the firm needed a bigger space. They took the “green” work they had been doing around the area and put these ideas into Windmill Market, which opened in October 2009.



MIC THOMAS PHOTOGRAPHY



At first, it was more of an open-air market that featured 80 vendors on weekends. They opened Sweet Olive in 2011, and since then the market has evolved into a combination of permanent and visiting vendors. Mac says that supporting new businesses is one of their core values. They are also in the process of working out an incubator kitchen for local chefs with new ideas. This focus on business and how commerce works is one of the Walcotts' passions, according to Mac.

The market is seen as a sort of community center for Fairhope and has become very popular over the years. Among its multiple functions and features are tastings, art shows, edible gardens, shops, restaurants, a music stage, events, weddings, school tours, political rallies, and so on. The Walcotts are proud to be a part of the community and provide a nice, comfortable gig for local, emerging artists.

In designing the market, Mac says they faced their challenges with the metal building but added a cool entry piece built from pre-fab scaffolding and gardens in the foreground. They used distinctive features, such as the cisterns out front and the large windmill seen from several blocks away, to draw you to the building, and then the smells, sounds, and



GREEN PRINCIPLES ARE AT THE HEART OF WINDMILL MARKET, FROM THE DESIGN OF THE BUILDING ITSELF TO THE LOCALLY SOURCED FOOD ITEMS AVAILABLE AT THE RESTAURANTS TO THE FOCUS ON LOW-ENERGY VENTILATION INSIDE AND RAINWATER IRRIGATION FOR THE GARDENS.



buzz of the active market draw you in.

According to Mac, “the whole premise is doing this from a green standpoint.” They save energy with a light footprint, and the building is kept between 65 and 80 degrees as part of a low-energy, natural ventilation strategy. He says they tried to use a recycled piece for everything in the design, including green paint products, and rainwater is collected for the gardens. In the beginning, they were able to use the windmill and solar panels to generate 30 percent of their power, but this has changed with the number of restaurants in the market now.

In 2015, Walcott Adams Verneuille received an award from the Alabama Council of The American Institute of Architects for Windmill Market. This is one of seven building projects to be recognized as examples of outstanding architecture.

Windmill Market brings together concepts and ideas about local gardening, sustainability, healthy eating, being green, and local commerce. The vision is for the market to become a regional landmark for local food, local music, local gardening, local crafts, and local discussion. It seems to be well on its way.

