

**Making Homes Wherever We Go:  
The Car, The Home and The Second Office**

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*I'm not trying to have a permanent home. I want the flexibility.*  
- Bill McNish, a businessman who commutes between two Michigan homes

New Yorkers, like Parisians, pack their bags and go away in August. Restaurant reservations and subway seats are easy to get as the pace of the metropolis slows and the weather grows sticky. We often stay put in the city, enjoying its emptiness. But one summer, circumstances led us to try a twist on this ritual: we moved from apartment to apartment within New York. This nomadic existence proved exhausting and exciting, and taught me a great deal about home.

Our journey began when the 1928 plumbing in our two bathrooms started to leak on the neighbors below. We timed the repairs for our vacation, expecting that when we returned, at least one toilet would work. But when we arrived home one languid evening - with one carsick daughter throwing up steps from our building, as if to express her homesickness - the apartment was uninhabitable. A bathtub and lengths of piping sat in the front hall. The bathrooms were rubble. We retreated to the apartment of an understanding friend who was out of town - the first of three city homes we ultimately borrowed from vacationing friends as our renovations stretched far beyond a promised five weeks.

My husband and I, both former foreign correspondents who love travel, found it fun to camp in these apartments. We felt strange opening cupboards or drawers looking for spoons or towels, and after a while, we tired of sleeping in different beds. But quickly, we made ourselves at home, eagerly exploring new neighborhoods and relishing new views of the city from each apartment's windows. Our daughters carted favorite dolls from house to house, and I set up my laptop in two dining rooms, a kitchen and home office. We returned home to pick up mail and telephone messages, or use our printer. It was difficult, but liberating. Just as work had become a portable exercise, so we were experimenting with a new kind of mobile living.

Later, it occurred to me that our summer of domestic moves echoed a collective American search for "home" outside home. In an age when technology weakens physical boundaries, Americans are paradoxically seeking out and setting up "homes" wherever they go. A friend in Denver reads his Sunday paper, not in his own house, but in a nearby Starbucks, a generic living room where strangers hang out without speaking to one another. The middle- and upper-classes are passing on rustic summer cottages in favor of comfortable second houses where they both work and play all year-round. On vacation trips, Americans seek homelike hotel rooms with kitchens, or all manner of timeshare arrangements. At a time when people commonly speak of living in their cars, the lines between mobile homes and automobiles are blurring. One new car can be turned into a sporty camper; "think of it as 'Road Warrior' without the weaponry," comments an auto writer. A concept minivan comes with refrigerator, washer/dryer, vacuum and microwave - to some consumers' chagrin.

My experiment with mobile living came to an end, and I own neither a car nor a second home. Still, I wonder whether my experience and our larger search for other

homes reflect a push for a more flexible, perhaps portable home - or a slide into homelessness? Are we searching for home because we've ruined the sanctity of our primary abode? Perhaps in the Internet Age, mankind will break free from the tethers of place, particularly the sometimes-suffocating ties that bind us to one home. But will we be able to make a place of sanctuary - in effect, a home - anywhere we go?

These are not all new questions. Once upon a time, the invention of the railroad, the steamship, and the automobile made travel universal and seemingly constant. "The tendency of the times is to render men homeless in more than the material sense," wrote Anna McClure Sholl in 1906. In an *Atlantic Monthly* essay entitled "The House," she argued that when the rich divide their time between homes "there is no time for ... those accumulated impressions which make up the sense of home." For the masses, in turn, "home is the tent, the lodging house, the vestibuled car, the ocean steamer, the furnished house to rent for a season." As an antidote to this rootlessness, Sholl didn't explicitly mention the Cult of Domesticity, yet she lauded an equally rigid ideal - an ancient homestead, shaped by generations of the same family. Sholl did not see home and mobility comfortably coexisting.

That's our challenge in the 21st century. In an age when mobility and technology dilute the importance of place, we need to create a more flexible idea of home. The difficulty lies in redefining home in ways that allow us to preserve - or in many cases, restore - the comforts of homes past, without losing the flexibility and freedom the Computer Age potentially gives us. The question becomes: can we find sanctuary, privacy and intimacy only in our primary homes, or could we make a home in "the tent, the lodging house, the vestibuled car..."? Where do we want to be at home?

## **Second home becomes part of American Dream**

Turn off the freeway between Detroit and Chicago, just before you hit Indiana, and you'll come to the tiny town of New Buffalo, Michigan. Cross the railroad tracks, with the vast blue waters of Lake Michigan stretching before you, then you'll find yourself on a wide Main Street that resembles a movie set for an old Western. A few of the low brick and wood-shingle shops are shabby and, on this October day, some have hand-lettered signs saying, "Closed Until Spring." In better-kept boutiques, a children's sweater sells for \$90, and a butter-soft suede women's jacket carries a \$500 pricetag. New Buffalo - not so long ago a down-on-its-heels summer mecca - is in transition, a town being transformed by Chicagoans seeking second homes.

"It used to be that the restaurants all closed up after New Year's and reopened in the early spring. Now they're year-round," says realtor Gail Lowrie, who moved to the area from Chicago a decade ago after owning a weekend house in New Buffalo for years.

Lowrie nibbles at a salad as we sit in the sunny garden of an Italian restaurant, talking about second homes. A calm, motherly woman with an assured manner, she just changed jobs, joining the newly opened local branch of a large Chicago agency that's seeking to capitalize on the growing second home market. Congratulatory bouquets from an opening party the night before fill the swank agency, one of at least a half dozen in town. Although the lakewaters are frigid and winter looms, Lowrie's day is filled with appointments. Some people say the town is turning into another suburb of Chicago, just an hour and 15 minutes down the road. New Buffalo is hot.

But then again so are Branson, Missouri, Sanibel Island, Florida and other little lake and seaside towns across the country. Although only about six percent of homes sold each year are second homes, sales in this area shot up nearly 30 percent nationwide in just five years. Undoubtedly, the booming 1990's stock market and healthy economy helped drive the rate of sales. But the boom doesn't tell the whole story. Long an idyllic symbol of summertime, the second home is becoming a more obligatory piece of the American Dream. Nearly one in three families believe that their chances of buying a second home are 50-50 or better, up from one in six families a decade ago. In contrast to previous generations, the trend seems to cross age groups. Interest in second homes is highest among adults younger than 35.

Nor do buyers want Grandma's old cottage, with its chilly outdoor shower or rough-hewn weathered walls. The Internet Age second homeowner might desire a wraparound porch or wooden floors, but seeks only the veneer of rusticity. Gail Lowrie describes new buyers as wanting "all the bells and whistles. The idea that you wouldn't have a garbage disposal or dishwasher is out of the question."

After lunch, she takes me for a drive along the lake, where multi-million dollar homes have been stuck on small plots next to older cottages with names like "Nothing Dune" or "Sans Souci." Along the quiet road, an inconspicuous ranch house neighbors a bright-white stucco mansion with Aegean blue trim. A stone Provencal-style manor dwarfs a bungalow. Every few hundred yards, a hive of construction crews swarm about a renovation or a new mansion born from a cottage's rubble. We stop at one torn-up property, where Lowrie introduces me to the owner, who has taken a tiny cottage and tripled it in size with a ballooning addition. The cozy, wood-paneled cottage, now a "guest wing," connects to a soaring living room, open kitchen and enormous master bedroom suite with hefty Jacuzzi. As I leave, workmen are finishing what looks to be a cement-block fountain in the driveway.

Again, look past the excesses born from a robust age, and past a status-symbol mentality that is timeless. Look deeper and you'll discover a great deal about people's changing attitudes toward home. In generations past, cottages were opened with great ritual once, or perhaps a few times a year, mostly in the summertime. E.B. White captured the rarity of such times, describing his family's annual trip to a rented lakeside cottage in Maine:

The arriving (at the beginning of August) had been so big a business in itself, at the railway station the farm wagon drawn up, the first smell of the pine-laden air, the first glimpse of the smiling farmer, and the great importance of the trunks and your father's enormous authority in such matters, and the feel of the wagon under you for the long ten-mile haul, and at the top of the last long hill catching the first view of the lake after eleven months of not seeing this cherished body of water.

A half century later, Amy Willard Cross recalls in her book *The Summer House* taking a 17-hour train ride, an hour's drive, an overnight stay, a three-hour drive, a ferry ride, and finally a half-hour's drive each summer to get to her family's vacation cottage. No wonder such houses were idealized. They represented a pure, rare escape into the woods or to the shore.

In this century, rustic cottages still exist. But second homeowners more often trek in all seasons to a house as comfortable as their first. They're dividing life between two (and sometimes three) homes in a way that only the very wealthiest had in previous centuries. Aided by technology, they prolong weekend visits into habitual half-week stays – and work from their “vacation” homes. They spend major holidays such as Thanksgiving or Christmas in these homes. Perhaps most telling of their loyalties, many homeowners are waging legal battles for the right to have a say in the governance of their second communities. They're truly living in two places. Are such homes interchangeable or does each fulfill a different role in life? How does this mobility change the experience of home?

*Our time here will be more personal time, thoughtful time, and  
I would associate that with home in the more classic sense.*

- Criss Henderson

The day after meeting Gail Lowrie, I drive along the old Red Arrow Highway hugging the lake to get to the second home of Rick Boynton and Criss Henderson. Off the two-lane highway, a winding road takes me into the hills, and deep into rain-washed woods turning tawny and rust. The house, painted an earth brown, nestles into a small valley, giving the sensation from within that you're in a treehouse.

The couple only purchased the house a week before, but seems completely at home. Pictures hang on the walls, and comfortable couches are neatly arranged in a two-story living room where enormous windows look out on the trees. At another end of the room, a wide dining table is decorated with a pair of candlesticks, and laid with warm blueberry muffins, sliced honeydew melon and coffee. Boynton, a boyish, bespectacled man wearing a red baseball cap, butters a muffin as Henderson fixes a cup of tea. With classical music playing and three golden dogs sprawled about contentedly, the house looks well-settled.

The week, however, has not been entirely peaceful. Moving exertions aside, Boynton and Henderson were constantly interrupted by their work as leaders of Chicago's Shakespeare Theater. “The phones rang all week,” says Henderson, a reserved man with an angular face and raven hair. “If the beepers weren't going, the phones were going, the faxes were going.” At a first, more suburban house they'd owned in the area, they had tried to exclude work. They had deliberately not brought in a fax machine. But they concluded that these attempts at complete isolation were unrealistic. Since they now hope to spend more time in Michigan than ever before, they must find a way to keep connected to work while still trying to preserve the retreat that a second home represents to them. “We really want this to be a place of relaxation, but be realistic that we might have to work,” says Boynton.

More and more, they feel that a second home is their only chance for retreat. They love their work, but it engulfs them night and day in Chicago, since the business and art of running the theater starts in the morning and ends late at night. Weekends are their busiest days, with the most shows. Although their city condo is as close to Lake Michigan as their country house is, they never stroll on the beach in the city. “We just give up trying to control work at home,” says Henderson, sipping his coffee and gazing

into the woods. "We don't even think about it. We don't even try." Their second home - where they have candlelit dinners, play music, savor the passage of time - is an escape from their first home.

### **Making and remaking boundaries**

This idea repeatedly arose in my interviews with more than a dozen second homeowners around the country. With technology and work invading the sanctity of the primary home, many people feel as if they can no longer control their lives there. As researcher Christena Nippert-Eng notes, when work and home are integrated, people spend a great deal of energy making and remaking boundaries. These days, the pace of non-work activities further squeezes out quiet moments, intimate relations and time for thought. As a result, second homeowners often transfer the traditional domestic function of "retreat" to their alternative home. Nearly all the 30 British couples with second homes in France interviewed by researcher Davina Chaplin said that their homes no longer feel like a private enclave, due to the intrusions of work or the pace of urban living. "The first home had become merely a dwelling place with no other significance except its function as shelter," Chaplin writes.

How then do people preserve the second home as a retreat? Often, they use a seemingly immutable boundary, a demarcation that can't be erased by societal pressures, work demands, accelerating technologies: landscape. This natural boundary allows people to make their second homes into the retreats they've lost in their primary abodes. The second home may not be an unadulterated escape, but the idea of sanctuary is nevertheless paramount. Repeatedly, second homeowners, such as Florida entrepreneur Leslie Wolff, told me that a natural setting drew them back from work and worries, and helped break the increasing expectation that they should be always on-call.

"It's hard to find a place where you totally get away from it all," says Wolff. "When I am getting my e-mail and I'm in my bathing suit, I feel good. At least I'm in a mindset of relaxing and I'm more laidback about returning a call or an e-mail." Wolff is anchoring herself to the landscape at a time when physical boundaries are being dissolved by technology and new ways to work.

For many, the journey to the second home helps separate a frantic daily life from a more leisurely pace by woods or shore. Rick Boynton and Criss Henderson relish the 75-minute drive from Chicago to New Buffalo. To get to their house, they must cross through Chicago's urban sprawl, the industrial landscape of Gary, Indiana, then the farm country around New Buffalo. In doing so, they cross two state lines and the boundary between Central and Eastern time. Although they and most other visitors to the area keep their watches on Chicago time while in Michigan, they are reminded of the hour time difference when they interact with the local community. The clock repeatedly reminds them that "home" and "retreat" are different worlds. I feel similarly when I make a summer trek to New Brunswick, Canada. Although we stay less than a week and are fewer than a dozen miles from the U.S. border, we feel more severed from our normal lives by experiencing a change in the clock.

The idea of a second home as a retreat is hardly new. The Romans discovered the allure of second home life 2,000 years ago, seeking an escape from the demands and restrictions of society. "There is no need for a toga, the neighbors do not come to call, it is always quiet and peaceful - advantages as great as the healthful situation and limpid

air," wrote Pliny the Younger of his villa outside ancient Rome. In 1559, when Giuseppe Falcone visited his Italian country house, he reveled in eating lots of garlic and doing menial chores such as toting firewood without "losing face" with friends. *House Beautiful* reported in 1970 that second-home owners "don't concern themselves so much about sand on the floor or an unmade bed."

The crowds, noise and dirt of city life, as well, have long inspired urban dwellers to seek the antidote of nature. In 1869, Reverend William Murray wrote *Adventures in the Wilderness; or Camp Life in the Adirondacks*, one of several books that romanticized rustic vacations and closeness with nature at a time of enormous technological change and urbanization. Interest in the Adirondacks led to the creation of the "great camps," extravagant log compounds pioneered by entrepreneur William West Durant. Following Durant's style, summer folk connected with nature by crafting birchbark butter plates, twig furniture and gun racks cobbled from deer hooves. It's easy to forget, as well, that Thoreau's cottage at Walden Pond was actually a second home, not many miles from his primary abode. From ancient Rome to modern times, the attractions of landscape have been a prime inspiration for acquiring what is, after all, often called a "country home."

Still, the role that second homes play in our lives today is changing. (For one, they are no longer necessarily country houses - 10 percent of second homes are in the city.) With our primary homes increasingly becoming public, frenzied places of business - headquarters or base camps of living - people are searching with a new urgency for a retreat. With the lines between work and home, public and private, strangers and intimates blurring, they are rediscovering the boundary of landscape as a shelter from the world. As a result, second homes are becoming year-round, alternative homes - a domestic alter-ego. Perhaps never before have so many people outside the aristocracy invested so much in dividing their lives between two houses. In doing so, they may be unconsciously echoing a lost inspiration for acquiring a second home.

For centuries, the inspiration behind country homes alternated between a drive for spiritual value and enjoyment of more bodily pleasures, according to author James Ackerman. Ancient Romans looked to their country homes as places to improve mind and body, and Petrarch described 14th-century villa life as ideally devoted to intense study and the domination of the unruly human spirit. But 300 years later, simple pleasures dominated. Agostino Gallo described a 16th-century vacation house "fishing party" in which nobles watched peasants drain a small pond, then slip comically in the mud as they tried to catch fish bare-handed. By the 18th century, the country home as pleasure house had won out, eclipsing any drive for self-improvement or moral value in these homes away from home.

Yet many people today are again looking for more than fun when they pursue a second home. People such as Rick Boynton and Criss Henderson are searching to create in their second home the feeling of sanctuary they can't find in their first home. They are taking the traditional domestic function of retreat and giving it an entirely separate setting. In doing so, they are creating a more flexible definition of home, one which melds a deep-felt need for sanctuary with an embracing of mobility. They are pioneers in our 21st century search for home.

*There is, in particular, a potential conflict between the ideas of home as an activity center and as a refuge, and resolving this will require careful planning.*

- William Mitchell, *e-topia*

What happens when people bring full-time work into the wild? Boynton and Henderson have imported the tools of work into their second home, yet are trying to preserve the sanctuary of that space. Others are attracted by the idea of bringing full-time work to remote, perhaps exotic areas, creating in effect what I call the "connected refuge." This seemingly paradoxical idea has tantalized people since the dawn of the computer age. In 1968, urbanist Melvin Webber sketched a romantic vision of this idea. "For the first time in history," he wrote, "it might be possible to locate on a mountain top and maintain intimate, real-time and realistic contact with business or other associates."

As if realizing this dream, a recent ad shows a woman in top-of-the-line mountaineering gear, seated upon an Everest-like peak, pecking at her laptop. The advertiser aims to show off the technology, but the scene is seductive because this woman seems to be having her cake and eating it too. She's reveling in nature, untethered to social demands. Yet with a click and tap, she can apparently re-enter society whenever she desires. In his book *e-topia*, William Mitchell accurately predicted a surge of people looking to move to those mountaintops to live and work. "We can expect then, that localities capable of one-upping others through their pleasant climates, spectacular scenery, and attractive recreational opportunities will attract not only holidaymakers but also a new class of permanent residents," he writes.

### **Integrating work and home**

How can this succeed? Doesn't the full integration of work and home on the "mountain top" create the kind of chaotic jumble of life that we suffer at home so often these days? Landscapes, time zones and travel are tools - perhaps crutches - we can use in order to draw boundaries around a place of sanctuary. But to realize the getaway that a second home promises, we have to be willing to use and respect those tools. In order to build a truly "connected refuge," we may also have to turn once again to the traditions of the Industrial Age, which value the separation of work and home.

Jim Hanlon and his wife Maddy have done just that in dividing their time between homes on sparkling blue bays in Florida and Rhode Island. A consultant who has lived around the world, Jim Hanlon telecommutes full-time from both of their homes. Yet he's so contented with this lifestyle that he doesn't take vacations. The Hanlons have redefined home in their own way, and, in doing so, built a home life that bridges the 20th and 21st centuries.

One chilly fall afternoon, I visited their house on Goat Island, a tiny spot of land connected by a causeway to the sailing mecca of Newport. They were just days away from their annual trek to their Florida home, and Hanlon kept going outside to check on the workmen fixing their back deck. But he ignored the persistent ringing of his work telephone in a basement office. Sipping a glass of minty iced tea, he told the story of how he and Maddy wound up dividing their time between two "alternate homes."

Years ago, the couple bought a Florida condo as an investment, but came to enjoy the area so much that they stopped renting it in order to spend more time there themselves. They were living in Connecticut, and were feeling burdened by the upkeep of the house and the long New England winters. "The house was 5,500-square-feet, and I don't think we'd been in the living room in two years," says Hanlon, a trim man who is as solemn as his wife is cheery. With technology making his work portable and their children grown, they sold the Connecticut house and bought the Newport condominium - embarking on a life divided between two smaller homes. "When the dog and the cat died, that was it! That's it, man, we're now free," said Hanlon.

Hanlon is quick to say, however, that they do not live in two *vacation* homes. When he's not traveling, Hanlon begins work in Rhode Island or Florida by 7:30 in the morning. He works a full day, then pops out of his home office and yells jokingly, "Maddy, I'm home!" before having an evening cocktail. Maddy ships her computer and household files from Rhode Island to Florida in October and back again each May. When they want peace or fun, they need only step outside - using the landscape, as other second homeowners do - as a powerful reminder of the need to retreat from the busy-ness of the day. Up north, his house is not big or showy, and sits in a line of similar townhouse condos. But the surroundings, a busy harbor speckled with snow-white boats, is stunning. In Florida, they can see the sun setting over the Gulf of Mexico from their condo. "I don't feel the need to take vacation trips, because I can, if it's warm, sit on the beach every weekend," said Hanlon. "You're in a resort area all the time." In essence, neither house is a getaway from the other house, or from another life. The couple carry their entire selves, not just their work self or relaxation self, from one place to another in an organized ritual.

This style of life succeeds because the Hanlons have married Industrial Age work habits with a flexible vision of home. Although his job is predicated on using technology to work anywhere, Hanlon has learned how to keep his work contained within his work day. "When the office is closed, it's closed," he says. At the same time, they are truly comfortable with the mobility of home, partly because they lived abroad for so many years. In their numerous foreign postings, they learned that "home" and "place" need not be rigidly wed. Just as nomads can have an iron-strong sense of family and home despite constant moves through the landscape, the Hanlons settled in each new city through the comfort of their possessions and their closeness as a family. "By the time you got in and got the furniture put down and hung up some pictures and made the beds, the kids felt at home," recalls Jim.

Surely, a sense of place is an important ingredient in the recipe for home. That's one reason why our memories of home are often built on sensory experiences, from the smell of our father's pillow to the comforting creak of a long-ago staircase. I was a bit glad when, during our stays in borrowed apartments, my children would sniffle into their beds at night, missing their own home. In one particularly palatial space, my 7-year-old moaned, "I don't like this drafty old place! I want to go home." The ability to revere place - whether a landscape or a particular house - makes us better able to make a retreat. Yet the experience of Jim and Maddy Hanlon shows us that the rituals, intimacy and comforts of home are not dependent only on a particular four walls or one view. Their new life, divided between two homes, underscores the idea that mobility and home can coexist.

### *Home Is Where You Are*

- Ford announcement for Windstar Solutions van

If mobility and home can co-exist, does this mean we can make homes anywhere - "in the tent, the lodging house, the vestibuled car, the ocean steamer," in Anna McClure Sholl's words? We seem to be trying. Along with importing home into the workplace, a trend that raises the specter of a kind of job-based homelessness, Americans are searching for home in places from automobiles to hotels. This trend offers the possibility of a mobility far beyond that of owning two homes, and begs important questions. If work has been freed from the confines of the office, can we make home portable? Do we want to?

"Bringing the convenience of home to the vehicle." That's the idea, Ford says, behind the Windstar Solutions minivan, a concept vehicle designed in cooperation with appliance maker Maytag. The Windstar looks like a run-of-the-mill minivan on the outside, but its interior takes an unusual turn. The vehicle features a microwave and washer-dryer, two refrigerator drawers, seat-back tray tables, hot-and-cold cup holders, wet-or-dry vacuum, a computer connection to home appliances, and a trash compactor. A one-of-a-kind, the van isn't intended for immediate production. Rather, the companies wanted to gauge consumer reaction to the idea of extending "home" to the car. Ford and Maytag bypassed auto shows to unveil the Windstar Solutions at a kitchen and bath trade show, then shipped the van to state fairs, and even a women's conference. Many people loved it and others grumbled. Marjorie Ryan, a mother viewing the van at the Minnesota State Fair, remarked that the idea that we need appliances everywhere we go is a "sad commentary on the pace of our lives today."

With or without appliances, Americans spend an enormous amount of time in their cars, a trend Ford researchers have been noting in their focus groups. "It wasn't uncommon for people to say they'd eat two meals a day in their vehicles," says Linda Lee, director of women's marketing at Ford. "That isn't counting the road warrior, people who literally use their cars for work. I'm talking about ordinary people like you and me who have other kinds of jobs."

The car-as-kitchen is just one of the ways in which we're treating the automobile as a portable home. Nowadays, cars are moving home offices, with cell phone calls and voice-activated e-mail juggled with driving. A general contractor, tired of the mess he made in his car while working, created the \$280 Executive Auto Desk, which fits on the passenger seat and features room for a laptop and storage for office supplies. American vehicles are also the new family room, featuring TV/video equipment with remote controls, voice recorders, satellite navigation systems and more. "Something domestic, as in cozy, has crept into car DNA," writes *The New York Times*. "It all started with cup holders, of course. But now minivans and other vehicles are being invaded by a flood of appliances and living room fixtures, from dual climate controls to computer game systems... ." Indeed, the way people use their cars, just as the way they experience their second homes, tells us a great deal about our changing attitudes toward home.

“Mr. Demas, is there an emergency in your vehicle? Mr. Demas? Mr. Demas, if you don't answer, I will have to send out the police.”

I'm watching a plump woman with a telephone headset speak from her desk in suburban Detroit directly into Mr. Demas' car as he drives through Sacramento, California. As an “adviser” with GM's wireless OnStar system, her job is to determine if Mr. Demas has had an accident, needs help or, more likely, pushed the OnStar emergency button in his car by mistake. She can notify emergency services if his airbag is inflated, open his car if he's locked out, direct him street by street through Sacramento if he's lost, and more. OnStar and its competitors in the fast-growing automotive telematics field are helping to redefine the role of the car in our lives.

Along with becoming a moving extension of our homes, the car is evolving into a kind of mechanized domestic servant. As well as eating, working and playing in our cars, we expect to accomplish chores or errands *in* our cars, not just in places we reach *by* car. A significant portion of calls to OnStar, for example, involve convenience or concierge services. That means that, for free or for a monthly fee depending on the model, OnStar advisers or a concierge service will locate ATMs, gas stations or hard-to-get restaurant reservations for customers. At the call center I visited, advisers get a rush of subscriber phone calls most evenings around midnight from travelers who don't know where they're staying that night. Such timing certainly indicates a willingness to put your personal affairs in OnStar's hands. Before OnStar drew the line, early subscribers asked the concierge service to make hair and dentist appointments, give wake-up calls and do personal shopping. “We had people who would call up and say, ‘I'm going to such-and-such a bar, could you please call ahead and have two dry, vodka martinis waiting for me? Joe the bartender knows me.’,” said Mike Peterson, an OnStar executive.

### **Finding sanctuary on vacation**

The yearning for home outside of home is so strong that the trend is inspiring new types of vacation accommodations that are a cross between second homes and hotel rooms, such as the “fractional ownership” clubs developed by upscale hotel chains including Ritz-Carlton. Unlike time-share owners who return to the same unit repeatedly, club members can spend about a month annually at condos or hotels nationwide. Such clubs infuse the timeshare concept with greater mobility. Hotel suites and condo rentals are also in demand.

Families are drawn to such spaces because they're often seeking to create on vacation the sanctuary they no longer find at home. Travelers of all sorts are spending more time than ever in their hotel rooms, hence they want comforts beyond a television and mini-bar. While hotel children's programs are well-used, the number of hours children spend in the programs is dropping. “You think, as a parent, what's going to create a quality time experience? Space and conveniences and a setting of home,” says Nancy Schretter, president of the Family Travel Network, a consulting and market research firm. “You'd just love to have this kind of time 365 days a year in a perfect world, but it's just not possible anymore.”

The drive to find “home” outside our primary abode shows me how hungry we are for the comforts of home. And that is not so bad. In a mobile society, at a time when we can be connected and informed and tapped day and night, we may need to start

feeling more at home in a world that's not always local and comprehensible. Still, we can't make a home anywhere. If we're nukuing our supper in the minivan because we never find the time to sit down and eat together, we're losing our ability to make a home. If we look to our five-day vacation in a rented condo to make up for all the missed conversation and time together of the year, we're losing our ability to make a home. We should feel at home in the world, and learn to carry with us the sanctuary we need to survive as human beings. But we shouldn't mistake cars or hotels as substitutes for home.

In his book *The Domestication of the Human Species*, anthropologist Peter Wilson explains his view that hunter/gatherer societies navigate the world primarily through the prism of "focus," while domesticated societies emphasize boundaries. His theory deserves consideration as a way of understanding the present and perhaps our future. Industrialization marked the zenith of a society of boundary making, while computers propel us into a world we navigate through focus. Now, we are struggling between these two worlds.

In many nomadic hunter/gatherer societies, Wilson wrote, people identify with ever-changing points in a landscape. Boundaries are hazy and relationships are flexible and fluid, with a great deal of individual self-sufficiency expected. Relationships are often personal, not formal or rule-governed. By the age of five or six, for example, a child from the Pandaram people in India ceases to have close emotional ties to his parents. "Without boundaries and without *the concept* of the permanent boundary, people are not conceptually locked into their relationships or surroundings," writes Wilson.

In contrast, the creation of permanent settlements, starting about 15,000 years ago, radically changed people's world view. With the institution of architecture, "time becomes repetition and recursiveness - the same things happen at different times in the same place - birth, death, growth, decay, ripeness, seasons, comings and goings," according to Wilson. In particular, the house becomes a center for and prism of the universe, an anchor for mankind. In ancient Greece, a man who did not own a house could not take part "in the affairs of the world because he had no location in it which was properly his own," Hannah Arendt writes.

Our society looks more and more like a system based on "focus," not boundaries. Our relationships at work, home, and in the community are increasingly fluid, in large part due to the influence of technology. Think of the demise of the traditional family, and the rise in free agent careers and mobility in work. In the Internet age, you can work with, love, learn about and relate to people without even knowing where they live. No matter where you are, your day is likely to be increasingly shaped by choices in what you focus on - the TV, pager, e-mail, cell phone, the road ahead, your cubicle-mate. Yet unlike humans 20,000 years ago, we also must deal with multiple landscapes and groups of people - all at the same time.

Our search for homes outside our home shows me that we are not entirely comfortable in a boundary-less society defined by "focus." Maybe someday we will be, and then perhaps we will have no need of home as a sanctuary. But for now, we still need to preserve places where cyclical time and stability can be found, where we can redraw boundaries around our closest relations and ourselves. Home allows us to "create an area of peace, calm and security ... where we can leave the world and listen to our own rhythm," writes Olivier Marc. "For once we have crossed the threshold and shut the door behind us, we can be at one with ourselves."

In this transitional age, however, home needn't be one rigidly defined place. Boundaries that cannot be crossed create prisons. "Incessant occupation is not essential to a home," pleaded Charlotte Perkins Gilman in 1903 as she tried to liberate women from the Cult of Domesticity that so often enslaved them. We can find home in a second home as domestic alter-ego or a connected refuge. We can make home a more flexible concept in an age that is halfway between "boundaries" and "focus." We can be both mobile and anchored in a rapidly changing world. But we can't mistake any place for a home. We should be at home in the world, while keeping a home for ourselves.