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green
homes

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LEAN, MEAN AND INCREASINGLY GREEN

By Amy Starensier Lee

For a while, a popular amphibian's lament about the difficulty of being a certain color was spot on. Kermit the Frog was right: It *wasn't* easy being green—particularly environmentally speaking. Implementing energy-efficient or green technologies in our homes was expensive, largely unattractive, inconvenient and oft-misunderstood. But the times, they are a-changin'.

"We had to fight to make energy efficiency accessible for a long time," says North Branford-based architect Lindsay Suter, who has been fighting the good fight his entire career. "Once upon a time it was the purview of hippies, then 'green geeks,' but my motto is: green design is good design. At the end of the day, if what we are doing is not affordable, it's not sustainable. And if it's not beautiful, and people don't want it, it's not sustainable either."

The numbers bear his theory out. According to the SmartMarket Report, the latest study by the National Association of Home Builders, 17 percent of new homes are considered "green" in 2011 compared to just 2 percent a decade ago. And that number is expected to almost double by 2016.

A number of factors have

combined to make building, remodeling or gradually improving the energy efficiency of our homes not only easier, but also more affordable. For starters, the economy is getting healthier and interest rates continue to be favorable. Add improvements in technology, product development, federal and state subsidies and better building codes and making the decision to improve the energy performance of your house is no longer a political move, but a financially sound one as well.

"All of our clients are seeing that wise investments will return very well over the long term," says Russ Campaigne, a principal with Campaigne Kestner Architects in Guilford, who explains that it's almost a no-brainer given the simple math of energy costs rising faster than inflation. "Almost everything we do returns fully in 10 years, and most in less than five."

Still, there's no absolute consensus that owning a sustainable, high-performing home is totally valued in the open market. Convincing people to choose a better-burning furnace over super-cool countertops remains a bit of a challenge. Particularly when the industry—including bankers, appraisers and the general home-buying public—is still slightly behind the

green market itself in terms of quantifying the value of improving home energy performance. "They just haven't caught up yet in terms of valuing these types of investments despite the fact that there are proven financial rewards from making an investment in the energy efficiency of your home," says Campaigne. "However, when it comes time to sell those properties, that investment is not factored into the value of the house."

According to the SmartMarket Report, the most popular green features are those that can provide more tangible, near-term value directly to the buyer, such as lower utility bills and less maintenance.

There's also the inherent consequence that increased popular awareness often creates. "It's great that 'being green' is mainstream now," says Suter. "But people have to be aware there are a lot of false claims out there."

But overall, the picture is good and getting better. Greening your home doesn't necessarily involve investing in high-tech systems, nor do you have to be off the grid to make an impact. The following five homes have been built or remodeled at various rates of efficiency. Take a look, and see what might work for you.



Lovers Lane Renovation, Guilford

Architect: Campaigne Kestner Architects, Guilford

Builder: Celebration Development Group

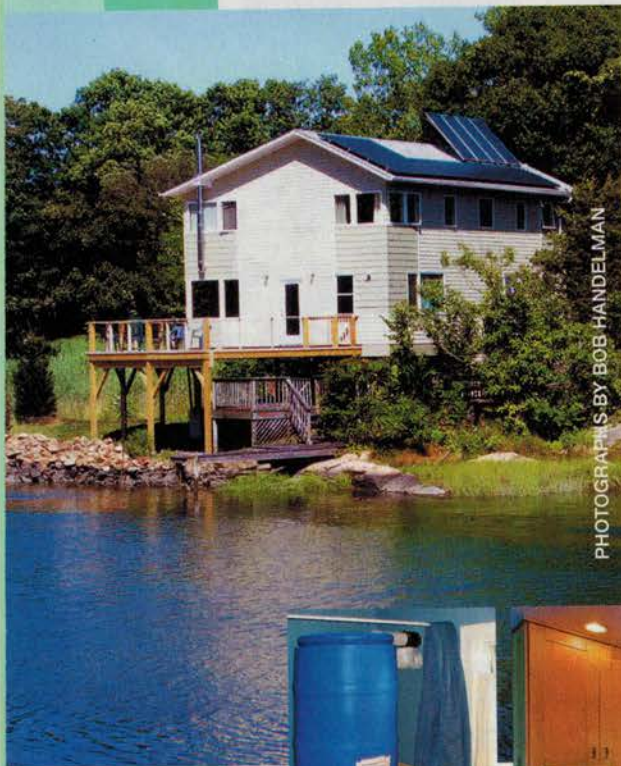
Square footage: 3,260

Awards/Ratings: HOBI Best New Haven County Residential Remodel, 2011

Energy efficiency: 47 HERS Rating

Key materials: Geothermal ground source heat pump, low-E windows, foam insulation, LED lighting, Energy Star appliances, on-demand hot water heater.

Key points: The result of this renovation and new addition is the complete transformation of a 1960s contemporary into a stylized home that is modern in every sense. Full of artistry that showcases the family's mid-century furniture, the home feels like a work of art itself, with the latest modern energy efficiencies as a Certified Energy Star Home.



Short Beach House, Branford

Architect: Lindsay Suter

Builder: Measure for Measure, Bridgeport

Square footage: 2,000

Cost to build: \$170 per square foot

Year built: 2009

Awards: Residential Honor Award given by Connecticut Green Building Council, 2011

Cost to heat: \$0. Home is a net generator of energy.

Key materials: Salvaged floors, doors, trim and wainscoting; solar hot water panels; solar photovoltaic panels; SIPS (Structural Insulated Panel), a hybrid prefab wall and framing system that reduces on-site construction costs and delivers a super-insulated house.

Key points: Every penny counted in the design and construction of this house. Passive solar design—placing windows where they will have the best sun exposure in the winter and near shade for the summer—was a key part of “getting the loads down.” “It’s not a palace,” says Suter, “But we wanted to prove that you can have a really nice, comfortable, beautiful and super high-performing building at a very affordable price.”

