

home

# sustainable

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By Julie Craig // Photos Courtesy of River Rock Builders



*F* healthy. Sustainable. Livable. Award-winning. These are all stellar ingredients when they mix to make up an entire eco-friendly home recipe for success. Homeowners Ann and Dr. Rick Owen researched their share of environmental homebuilding components before embarking on a dream journey with River Rock Builders to update their historic Heights home of 12 years. It not only showcases eco-friendly at its finest, but it truly exemplifies how sustainable design enhances comfort and livability in any home.

In this instance, “update” means the home was completely torn down and rebuilt from the ground up to include a plethora of features meant to reduce its carbon footprint. From landscaping and irrigation to countertops and lighting, many aspects of the home received a gorgeous, green makeover. The Owens installed 42 solar PV panels to produce enough energy to power the 2,662-square-foot residence. The interior green features include: Energy Star appliances; WaterSense fixtures; recycled glass countertops; LED lighting (of which builder Keith Wingfield says, “If you aren’t using LED everywhere, you are missing the lighting boat.”); locally-sourced glass and mirrors; cast-iron sinks and tubs; vintage and upcycled light fixtures; and no-VOC paint from Sherwin-Williams.

In fact, the couple’s drive to build the healthiest, most sustainable home they could led them to certify their home in 2018 and go on to win “Project of the Year” in the 2018 LEED Homes Awards.

“I wanted to do something that was energy efficient and provided economy as a good investment [in a] personal home,” says the president of River Rock Builders, Wingfield, who became Arkansas’ first Certified Green Builder in 2007 and then went on to earn his LEED AP with the USGBC in 2010. “I wish more Arkansans would wake up and understand what a more clean, energy-efficient and healthy home they can live in by practicing just a few of these principles while building a new home.”

The Owens had a goal of achieving a LEED Platinum rating through the United States Green Building Council. “I explained the difficulty to achieve this rating; it’s only given to the best of the best green homes and buildings in the country,” Wingfield says. “When I found out we would get the Platinum rating and told Ann, she was beyond excited to know that their home had made it to the top of ratings. What we didn’t expect was how far we would go with the project, winning Arkansas Green Home of the Year and then finally the National Award for Project of the Year.”

One green “principle” featured in this American Craftsman-style residence is that of reusing. When replacing their existing home, the homeowners took great care in reusing





salvageable fixtures, appliances and materials. These materials were then collected and sold by the local chapter of Habitat for Humanity.

Another principle? Restore. During the landscaping process, to reduce water and chemical usage, the family decided to forego a lawn in favor of permeable surfaces. That means there is no grass sod on the entire landscape since grass is the No. 1 demand for water. Native plants adorn the property, and eight rain barrels are used for irrigation. In a process of restoration, the property's grass was reallocated to a local preschool playground after de-sodding. In addition, the driveway is filled with porous concrete to eliminate any excessive runoff for stormwater and to get the stormwater filtered into the ground quickly.

Perfect for entertaining, the Owens' home includes a fantastic screened porch with a huge sliding door and a separate outdoor deck, allowing for large gatherings to mingle inside and out. "The owners love to show off the house, but not in the normal sense. They want everyone to see that sustainability and green is a way to live efficiently, economically, healthy and comfortably," Wingfield says.

And certain to be a popular conversation starter at any party is the recycled glass countertops made by renowned manufacturer Vetrazzo. "It's another way to recycle and reuse materials over and over again," Wingfield says. "These surfaces come in many, many different patterns and colors, and Ann's kitchen counters are very bright and colorful — in many ways expressing her cheerful attitude of life!" The electric color palette throughout the home lends an aura of pure happiness — from purple to lime green to aqua blue and orange — and contrasts with bam-

boo flooring and porcelain tile. A very roomy and eye-catching kitchen island bursts with color from the addition of six bright orange barstools.

After the home project was finished, the Owenses opened their home when several hundred community members attended open houses hosted by the LEED homeowners to learn more about residential sustainability.

Much like them, homeowners can research before deciding how to go green. Wingfield mentions that anyone living in an existing home more than 20 years old should contact utility providers to see what incentives are offered to help reduce utility bills through energy savings. "The simple things of caulking, sealing and weather stripping are easily done. A little more difficult is the sealing of the duct system," he says. "Would you be surprised if I told you the average home in Arkansas loses almost 40 percent of their conditioned air (either hot or cold) through duct leakage? It's a documented fact by our utility providers, and even new homes have duct systems that leak up to 25-30 percent because they don't have proper filtration, provide fresh air and are much less healthy than a LEED-certified home or Energy Star home."

In the end, building an award-winning green home is always a fulfilling process for Wingfield. "I'm very satisfied to know that I have one more customer who understands the efficiency and sustainability in their home," Wingfield says. "I want them to tell everybody they know that you can live in comfort, with clean air, at a fraction of the cost of your neighbor. It takes an investment — but really, what doesn't?" <sup>AV</sup>

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Green building is fundamentally about living with clean air in a healthier environment, using sustainable materials, and lowering energy costs.

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