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home

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By Julie Craig // Photos Provided By River Rock Builders

RIVER ROCK
— BUILDERS —

Creating a more comfortable and resilient home.

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

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SINCE 1999, RIVER ROCK BUILDERS OF CENTRAL ARKANSAS HAS BROUGHT DREAM HOMES TO LIFE THROUGH STATE-OF-THE-ART VIRTUAL TECHNOLOGY AND SUPERIOR ENERGY EFFICIENCY.



little slice of heaven



PATTY AND KEITH WINGFIELD ARE CERTAINLY NO STRANGERS TO THE HOME BUSINESS.

After all, Patty's father was one of the founding members of the Arkansas Home Builders Association in the early 1950s, making the shift into commercial appraising in the 1960s. About the time Patty and Keith were married, he was the developer of a large single-family-home-subdivision in Sherwood. "He understood so much about the entire real estate and construction industry," she says.

Keith, the son of a full-time design engineer for Alcoa and a part-time builder in the '60s and '70s, credits his father for much of his career path as well. His father began building full-time until the recession of 1980-81 when interest rates rose to 20 percent. "He taught me a lot and helped me after he retired from 1999 until his death in 2006."

In 1999, Keith and Patty started River Rock Builders. "We were not strangers to home building," he says, crediting both his and Patty's home building family background. "We built our first house for ourselves in 1983, and our second in 1997. You can't do that unless you have some experience or help."

These days, we all know "going green" is of utmost importance, and River Rock focuses on custom home building with an emphasis on energy efficiency. "Energy is not a cliché topic for us. I mean, we don't just talk the talk. We walk it — all the way," Keith says. "We understand the building science of energy efficiency where others really don't. We energy model and test all our homes. That sets us apart from every other builder."

What also sets the company apart is its in-house 3D design capabilities that enable the team to give clients a unique experience where they can virtually walk the space of their dream home before it becomes

reality.

The team, also composed of project manager and designer Ryan Renard as well as interior designer Bridget MacKenzie, showcases its building mastery with the Ferndale home featured here — or "little slice of heaven," as homeowners Mary Jane and Mike Cole like to call it.

Once you arrive and soak up the spectacular view from the very high ridge that looks both north and south, it's clear to see how it gets this name.

"When Mike met me to look at the site and the plans, the first thing I said was, 'We need to change the plans to fit the ridge,'" Keith says. "We did, and still have some topography challenges to deal with now. It was a challenge just to go on the roller-coaster road to get to the top."

The entire project took about 19 months, but as Keith says, "You have to see the environment to understand that." The team could only bring in fill materials in half loads and concrete in 6 cubic yard bunches. "The logistics were really problematic throughout the project," Keith adds.

But the tough logistics turned out to be one of the greatest assets of all — the exterior. The landscaping has many features that highlight the scenery from the outcropping of rock placed on the embankment of the cut in the ridge to the running stream and small pond that makes for a peaceful feeling. The view at sunset is simply stunning and really sets the house apart. The owners wanted a stone and wood siding look but with a modern exterior, so the team combined natural stone from Schwartz Stone, from Scranton, with a new reverse board and batten siding product from Louisiana Pacific, called Smart Siding. The Smart Siding came pre-finished with a wood stain and the reverse board and batten mirrors a cool, lapped horizontal siding. The thin veneer stone was cut into various rectangular shapes and then tumbled to take off the sharp edges. The blend of the two products looks like nature pulled it all together.

But the home isn't just all natural in its looks. It is sustainable at its finest.

"If it's not sustainable, River Rock doesn't do it," Keith says. "We use

high-performance materials like the Smart Siding, which is an engineered wood (sustainable) siding with a 50-year warranty. The stone is a natural product and extremely durable."

The entire building assembly from the foundation to the tip of the roof is foam-filled to provide the maximum efficiency to the walls and attic.

"This home is built to be a high-performance home with all the materials selected to be some of the best available," Keith says. The team used an exterior sheathing product manufactured by Huber Engineered Woods called Zip-R. It has an integrated moisture and air barrier membrane that is attached to the exterior surface of the sheathing. In addition, a half-inch closed-cell foam board insulation is laminated to the interior side of the sheathing, providing a thermal break between the wood studs and the wood. "This thermal break not only adds the wall R-value but substantially reduces the thermal transfer that a wood to wood connection allows."



eco-friendly at its finest



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 recycling. 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.

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,” he 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?” ^{AV}

THIS SAME STANDARD OF SUSTAINABILITY MET A DIFFERENT STYLE IN AN UPDATED HOME IN THE HEIGHTS.

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 plumbing 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,

