

home

Two's A Charm

Two of AY's Hall of Fame homes pair up for a stunning aesthetic with contemporary functionality.

By Julie Craig // Photos Provided By River Rock Builders





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 appraising in the 1960s to focus on commercial appraising. About the time Patty and Keith were married, he was the developer of a large single-family 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, with the help of his brother, 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," Keith says. Keith credits his father for much of his career path.

In 1999, Keith and Patty started River Rock Builders.

"We built our first house for ourselves in 1983, and our second in

1997," Keith says. "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 clichéd 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 of 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 office manager Christin Hayes, 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. The addition of Bridget MacKenzie, Interior Designer, in 2020 completes the River Rock team and is a welcome addition Keith says. She's a California girl who obtained her training from the San Diego Art Institute and brings fresh ideas to the team.

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.

The tough logistics led to one of the home's 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 peaceful running stream and small pond. 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 in Scranton, Arkansas 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," Keith points out.

"[River Rock] specializes not only in supreme energy efficiency but also in the most difficult of job sites," Keith adds. "Other builders might run from a steep hillside, but we really run towards them. It's a challenge, but I employ professional engineers, surveyors and geotechnical engineers to make recommendations on how to build a foundation and structure."

Once inside, the mesmerizing two-story living room includes a circular stairwell that wraps around the elevator, creating a gap from the circle to the flat wall.

"It's two stories tall, and the artwork that hangs in this gap is really cool," Keith says. As a bonus, the semi-circle is formed on the exterior as well and is visible in the front elevation as a circular feature of the home.

Additional chandeliers and pendant lights make for a modern and elegant ambiance throughout. The interior features subtle hues of mostly white and light greys brought to life by both Patty and interior designer Carol Lantz. The interior doors and kitchen cabinetry were stained to look weathered.

"It was difficult to get the actual weathered look, but I really think they turned out well after some replacement cabinet and interior doors were installed," Keith says. "What most customers don't know is that lighter stains go into the wood differently from wood to wood, even in what should be the same manufacturer. That's because wood varies in nature from tree to tree even though it's the same species."

Prefinished hardwood and tile envelop the entire space, including several porches with whimsical daybed swings. "This home is the Cole's oasis. There are so many relaxing areas in this home, both interior and exterior," Keith says. "Even the laundry room is spacious because Mike likes to do the laundry, and he wanted room to spread out."

"I often say that we are married to the client during construction," Keith says, "and in some cases forever. We have to work together to achieve a common goal much like a husband and wife work together to make a good marriage."

"Our ultimate goal is always the same on every project, and that is to make the customer happy. We want customers to have the home of their own dreams."

Stylish Sustainability

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 Owenses 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 Keith, 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 Owenses had a goal of achieving a LEED Platinum rating

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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,” Keith 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 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.

And certain to be a popular conversation starter at any party is the recycled glass countertops made by renowned manufacturer Vetrasso. “It’s another way to recycle and reuse materials over and over again,” Keith says. “These surfaces come in many, many different patterns and col-

ors, 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 bamboo 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. Keith 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?” 

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