

North Lake Homes: Green becoming more affordable, practical

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Above: photo features radiant floor heat, Energy Star windows by Andersen Windows, Travis fireplace, TimberTech decking, and Cultured Stone

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When you build a home, there are many green choices. Some choices are simple and relatively inexpensive, such as using Energy Star appliances and planting a tree to reduce the summer sun. Some choices are complicated or experimental such as straw bale homes, collecting gray water for reuse, solar, or waste systems that are eaten by worms. Luckily, green building choices are becoming more affordable and more practical as demand increases.

Being green isn't all or nothing. There are shades of green that reflect your values and your budget. If you are a "light green" person, your priorities might focus on controlling energy consumption and having a spot for recycling in your kitchen. Maybe you are a dark green person and you want a net-zero home that produces as much energy as it consumes, or you want to reuse old barn wood for your flooring.

Manufacturers are quick to label their product as “green”, but products also have shades of green. Bamboo is a fast growing resource but much petroleum is used to transport the product from Asia to the job site. I consider hardwood floors a green product. Even though I’m utilizing a tree, it’s a beautiful product that will remain in the home for 100 years. We analyze lifecycle of the products as well as your long term operating costs when designing homes.

Tips for homeowners:

1. Install fan timers – you’ve spent a lot of money getting your home to an exact temperature – don’t waste it by leaving the fan on for 5 hours.
2. Increase your landscaping to shade your home for the summer
3. Add quality blinds that will keep your home cool in the summer
4. Replace windows if your vinyl windows are more than 7 years old or if the UV factor is high (above .35).
5. If you use CF bulbs, dispose of them properly because they have mercury.

Tips for new home construction:

1. Use windows with a UV rating of .35 or lower
2. Use Energy Star appliances
3. To reduce your operating costs, consider Radiant Floor heat, dual-fuel systems, zone systems, and insulation that goes beyond code requirements.
4. Highly efficient fireplaces that can heat 1400 sq feet. You can have ambience and heat your home at the same time.
5. Some “Green products” that we use include: Healthier Choice Carpet padding, cork, Marmoleum/Linoleum flooring, low VOC paints, HardiPlank siding, Andersen Windows, drip system sprinklers, and fan timers.
6. Dimmer switches are a great way to save energy costs.

My best advice:

1. Use the best, long-lasting materials you can afford
2. Do everything you can to decrease your operating costs since energy costs will continue to rise over time.
3. Find a builder that will tell you the positives and negatives about any product.

Evaluate your lifestyle and your builder will help you put all the right materials in all the right places.