

THE NATURAL CHOICE

By Karla Araujo

Island architects and builders agree: green living has come a long way. Early adopters of green technology often had to settle for a limited selection of costly materials with little aesthetic value. Today's consumers find myriad choices in products that are both hidden in the construction and visible in the décor of their homes. Whether you are amending an existing home or building a new one, green technology can be incorporated into every step of construction and decorating.

But what is green living and how can you incorporate its benefits into your home?

Island experts offer advice on how homeowners can increase their physical comfort, save money, and reduce their environmental impact.

As Island builder Ben Kelley, president of Building Shelter points out, "Green living is about living more comfortably and efficiently. It's about not making any compromises in quality."

Start with an energy audit

If you have an existing home and are preparing to make improvements, consider starting with an energy audit. Companies like Cape

Light Compact (caplightcompact.org), a regional energy services organization, offer free evaluations. A trained technician will visit your home, assess its overall energy efficiency and make recommendations for improvements.

More in-depth audits are offered by on-Island experts, including South Mountain Company of West Tisbury and Adam T. Inc., an Oak Bluffs building company. The results of an energy audit will pinpoint where a home is losing energy and how to fix it.

Building smaller

Historically, when it comes to home design, Americans have embraced the idea that bigger is better. The average New England home, circa 1775, was 700 square feet and often contained seven residents or more. In most cases, houses averaged a little more than 120 square feet per person. Today's typical family of three averages a whopping 1,200 square feet per person in personal space — as much as 10 times that of our ancestors.

Kevin Cusack, president of Autumn Construction Company in Oak Bluffs for more than 25 years, predicts a return to tradition: "We can



PHOTO BY RALPH STEWART

Kevin Cusack, president of Autumn Construction Company, checks a solar panel on the roof of a Vineyard home.

live in 1,500 to 1,800 square feet and save on energy costs, products, taxes and insurance."

Most experts agree that greener living means thinking smaller. "You can't build a green huge house," cautions Jamie Weisman, princi-

pal architect at Terrain Architects. "A 10,000-square-foot house can't be green no matter how well insulated. If you build more than you need it's environmentally insensitive."

Living on a smaller scale necessitates better space

planning. Mr. Kelley says versatility is key: "You have to start being more creative in carving out spaces under stairs, for instance, or using attics."

Green from the ground up

Building green, according to all the experts, requires a team approach. It's not uncommon for Island homeowners to sit down with an architect, a builder, a mechanical contractor for the heating and cooling systems, and an interior designer.

"You have to think of a house as a whole system," advises architect Kate Warner. She and contractor Gino Mazzaferro, president of ICMC Inc., are launching a new consulting venture, Energy Wise MV, to help educate people in the building trades and consumers about energy-efficient living.

New or existing homes can gain enormous efficiencies by beefing up insulation from the foundation up. Fiberglass batts are being replaced by newer technologies like blown-in cellulose, a product made from recycled newspapers that can increase insulating efficiency by up to 30 percent. Builders recommend going beyond

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state code in insulation in order to contribute to what Mr. Mazzaferro calls a "tight building envelope."

Builders and architects also recommend spending the extra dollars for high efficiency windows and doors. Homeowners can look for products that are National Fenestration Rating Council-certified (NFRC), which allows you to determine and compare energy properties of various products. Look for the Energy Star label on doors, windows, skylights and appliances — even in new homes. Energy Star is a joint project of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Department of Energy that was created to help consumers save money and protect the environment. Visit energystar.gov for details.

Once the house is tightly sealed with high efficiency insulation, doors, and windows, proper ventilation is crucial. A tightly sealed house that lacks uniform ventilation can lead to condensation, mold, and poor air quality. An important component of a green home is a whole-house ventilator, which provides controlled ventilation throughout the house.

While green products might be priced 10 to 20 per-

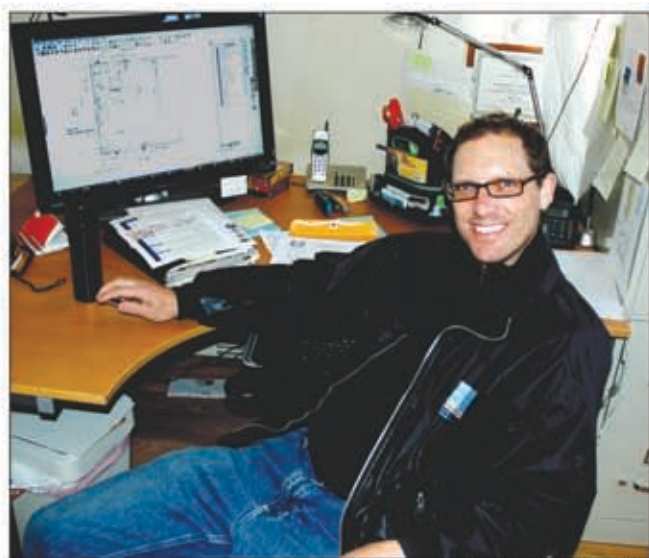


PHOTO BY M.C. WALLO

Ben Kelley owns Building Shelter, an Oak Bluffs company that specializes in environmentally conscious construction.

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cent higher than their conventional counterparts, experts emphasize that these costs are often offset by greater operating efficiencies and longer product life span. There's no doubt that green construction is big business nationwide. Last year, U.S.

consumers spent nearly \$60 billion for green building materials, a number that's expected to exceed \$80 billion by 2013.

Karla Araujo, a freelance writer, is a regular contributor to The Times.

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