

THE TOMORROW HOUSE

Building for the future meant reducing and reusing

BY KAREN EUBANK | PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRISTINA BARANY

Anna Clark stopped. She stopped planning for the next vacation. She stopped planning for the new car. She stopped planning for the next “big thing.” She analyzed her priorities and changed her life.

“I had always felt that I wanted to make a difference in some way, particularly with conservation or the environment,” she said. “And yet when I looked at how I lived, it was thoroughly conventional.”

Four years ago, Clark and husband Mike lived in a typical brick home in Lakewood, created by a large production builder. The floor plan was unremarkable, the design unexceptional, and the materials certainly unsustainable. With a baby on the way and a toddler in tow, not to mention Casper, the imposing but extremely hospitable Mastiff, the family needed more space.

Along with growing her family, Clark was growing a new sustainability consulting business, Earth People Co., that helps companies implement customized green strategies.

The green building seed took root after Clark participated in a sustainability discussion group.

“I remember thinking, ‘I don’t need a new car right now, but if I can make a difference with my house, maybe we could build green,’” she said. “It was the first serious decision we made to reduce our environmental footprint in a meaningful way.”

It made sense on a practical basis for Mike Clark.

“If you’re going to build a house, why not build it to last and build it with the utmost level of performance and energy efficiency?” he asked.

During an oil change, Anna Clark read an article about local green builder Alan Hoffmann and thought her company could provide services in harmony with his building ethic. Within a month of their meeting with Hoffmann, the Clarks hired him to build a sustainable home.

Set on a leafy lane in Little Forest Hills, the Clarks’ new home looks like a slice



With its xeriscaped yard, metal roof covers, and Western cedar flank shutters, the exterior of Anna Clark’s home sets the tone immediately for a LEED certified house.



of Hill Country heaven. Warm chunks of palomino Granbury stone grace the sun-washed stucco. Shutters made on site from rich Western cedar flank the windows. A bronze-colored metal roof covers the wide front porch that overlooks a native Texas xeriscaped yard.

It’s not what you’d expect. There are no solar panels or geothermal heat pumps, and it did not cost a fortune to construct; yet this home is LEED certified at the platinum level, meaning the U.S. Green Building Council has recognized this home for attaining the highest benchmark in green design, construction, and operation. It is one of only seven in Texas to receive this certification.

How was it done?

“A high-quality building envelope is the most critical feature to a green home,” Hoffmann said. His trademark is building homes with insulated concrete forms

(ICFs), which are Styrofoam blocks with concrete poured inside them. Think giant Legos — really thick giant Legos.

“It’s a 21st-century way to pour concrete and create an incredible structure,” Hoffmann said.

A misconception about green building is that it involves a higher technology that does not exist or is cost-prohibitive.

Alan Hoffman Company: concretehomestore.com
Earth People Co.: earthpeopleco.com
Anna Clark: annamclark.com
Green, American Style by Anna Clark: amazon.com
 Release date April 2010

“Thermal mass walls are really pretty low-tech,” he said.

Another important Hoffmann trademark is the mechanical room. Rather than installing the HVAC unit in the attic, high efficiency is maintained by keeping the unit insulated inside a small room. The Clarks’ home is just a little more than 3,000 square feet, which would normally require 6 or 7 tons of air conditioning. The

Anna Clark’s home’s thick walls keep the noise outside, even in this room at the entrance.



Anna Clark and her son, Ryan, enjoy spending time together in their great room, which sits next to an open kitchen.



building envelope of ICFs and the interior mechanical room allow the home to be heated and cooled with only 2 tons. The ductwork runs through the first and second floor instead of the attic, which prevents further loss of air.

Above all, the house is a home. Despite its incredible energy efficiency, it still feels like a home and looks like a home. Clark has furnished the house in a warm, inviting manner with a mixture of traditional, rustic, and contemporary pieces, as well as a few antiques. Whenever possible she will reuse, repurpose, and refurbish old furniture rather than buy new. Even the art in the Clark household was purchased on consignment or in support of local artists.

The Clarks did not have to give up high ceilings or a great room to be green. The homes Hoffmann builds look like homes we are all used to seeing, inside and out.

A hand-painted lion watches over Ryan Clark as he sleeps in his bedroom.

The window from the staircase shows the thickness of the walls of this well-insulated home.

The difference is that he builds for longevity. His motto "building like there is a tomorrow" underscores a core tenet of sustainability: durability not disposability.

Living green agrees with the Clarks.

"I've always maintained that you don't need to be an expert to change the world," Anna said. "You just have to be willing to do something different."

Part of that difference for Anna Clark was writing a book (*Green, American Style*) about ways that Americans are going green and benefiting from it. Slated for an April 2010 release, the book presents a more personal approach to sustainability.

"Living in my green home has changed the way I see the outside world," Clark said. "I'm not exactly Thoreau at Walden, but I do have a heightened appreciation for the beauty of nature again. It's like I got my senses back. I can breathe again." ❖

