



# It Pays to Go Green

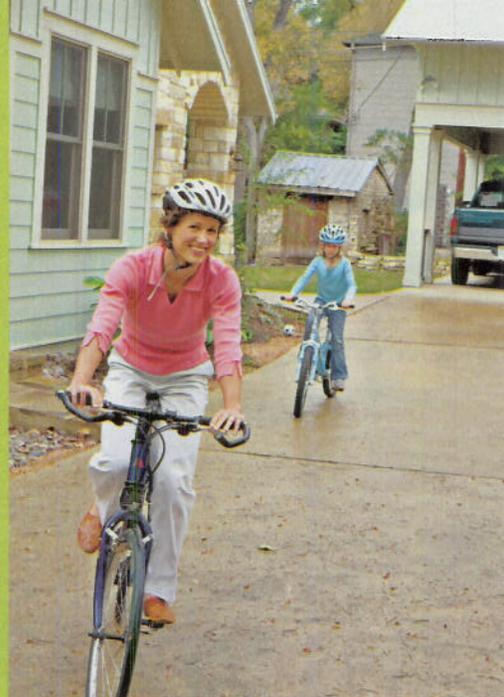
15 ways an Austin, Texas, family saves money, time, and energy in a new house that's environmentally friendly inside and out.

You might never guess that this attractive home is so hardworking. It's built from durable materials; it enlists nature to help heat and cool it; and it's supremely energy efficient, garnering the highest rating a green-built house can have. Best yet, "it's not weird," says owner Ann Phipps.

She and her husband, Mike Cannatti, are environmentally minded: They and their three children are dedicated recyclers and save gas by riding bikes to run errands; Mike takes his motor scooter to work 10 miles away. But Ann chalks up their desire for a sustainable lifestyle to one word: "Laziness."

"We'd rather spend time with each other instead of taking care of the house and spending money on things we don't have to," she says. "Our siding's paint will last 10 years or more. Our air conditioning system needs a filter only every year and a half." And their electricity bill averages just \$70 a month. "We actually smile when we pay our bills now," she says. The architect of this home, Peter Pfeiffer, is of the same mind. "Those of us who grew up in the horn of plenty have forgotten the art of good thrift," he says. "Green building is about just that."

WRITTEN AND PRODUCED BY **DENISE GEE**  
PHOTOS **EDMUND BARR** STYLING **MICHAEL WALTERS**



## 1 LOCATION

It all starts with where you live. To save gas (and time), Ann, above, and Mike chose infill property in a neighborhood that's conveniently close to their bank, grocery store, and children's school.

## 2 STONE

Limestone, used to face parts of the home's exterior, is inexpensive and plentiful in Austin. "It requires less energy to produce than a material like brick," says Peter Pfeiffer.

## 3 SIDING AND TRIM

Fiber-cement siding and composite wood trim (recycled from milk jugs and wood chips) resist hail, fire, rot, and insects.



“Saving anything—water, energy, or money—is always the most obvious way to reduce your cost of living and impact on the environment.”

—ARCHITECT PETER PFEIFFER

#### 4 AIRFLOW

A raised stone fireplace in the living room, *above left*, brings heat to where it's most welcome when the family gathers here: the height of the seat cushions.

#### 5 THERMOSTAT

Digital programmable thermostats sense humidity in the house and correct the level when needed.

#### 6 OVERHANGS

This home's overhangs extend 3 to 5 feet to provide summer shading. Another bonus: "We don't have to clean our windows very often," Ann says.

#### 7 LANDSCAPING

Drought-tolerant native plants minimize water usage. Shade from existing trees helps keep the house cool.



## 8 SCREEN PORCH

The porch is positioned to capture southeasterly breezes. Doors lead from the porch to the living room for added light and airflow.

## 9 METAL ROOF

The Galvalume metal roof is made from post-industrial recycled steel. It resists cracking and corrosion, and its light color deflects heat.

## 10 CARPORT

Attached garages can allow gas and paint fumes and other toxins into the home. This detached carport improves indoor air quality.

# What makes a home green?

The words “green building” may conjure images of solar-powered pods, rammed-earth dwellings, or just plain weird houses. “That’s why I’m increasingly using the term ‘high-performance building,’” says architect Peter Pfeiffer. Here are the top three characteristics of a high-performance house:

## Saves energy

“Saving anything, whether water or energy or money, is always the most obvious way to reduce your cost of living and impact on the environment,” Pfeiffer says. Having energy-saving mechanical systems (such as hydronic water heaters, low-flow toilets, and Energy-Star-rated appliances) in a well-insulated home is key to that goal.

## Improves health

“We shouldn’t sleep with our cars anymore,” Pfeiffer says. Detached garages or carports ensure that toxic air keeps its distance. Green-built houses also use nontoxic paint and have carefully sized heating and air conditioning systems, which thoroughly filter and dehumidify the air. In addition, these houses make use of high-quality exhaust fans and offer ways to bring in fresh air.

## Reduces impact

“It’s easier to build houses in a city where there are already lots, utilities, and services set up for housing to exist,” Pfeiffer says, so building on infill property is inherently eco-friendly. “Stores and schools are already nearby; so are utilities like sewer, water, and electricity. Truly building green means not having to create everything anew.”



**11 FLOORING** Linoleum and oak are durable, easy to clean, and help reflect light. Linoleum is made from natural materials, and “using oak is just good common sense,” Pfeiffer says. “It’s plentiful and affordable; plus we’re not expending energy to import an exotic wood.”

**12 WATER HEATER**

In addition to providing hot water, the Polaris water heater also handles space-heating needs with a radiant floor hydronic system.

**13 APPLIANCES**

Pfeiffer always recommends Energy Star-certified appliances, which are high-quality products verified to be more efficient than nonrated appliances.



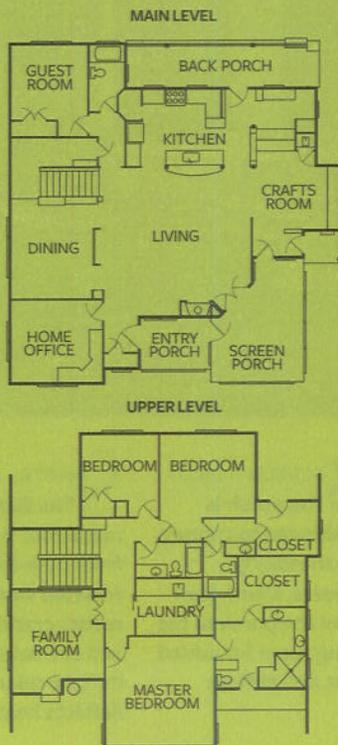
**Smart layout saves energy**

The 3,600-square-foot house is designed for a family of five and, potentially, an elderly relative who might need to move in one day.

**Open floor plan** On the main level, only the guest room, bath, and Mike’s home office are enclosed. The open plan offers reduced energy consumption (air circulates naturally throughout the space) and less use of building materials.

**Dual systems** Two air conditioning systems allow for independent zoning of each floor. This makes for better control of comfort, less energy consumption, and greater flexibility as living needs change over time. “That’s why all the main bedrooms are on the second floor,” says Pfeiffer.

**Screen porch** The porch is positioned so that incoming breezes travel across the living room and up the stairwell, where warmer air is released through electrically operated windows.





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**14 STAIRWELL**  
 “We wanted to let in natural light and also offer storage,” Pfeiffer says of the dining room cabinetry along the stairwell, which is designed to allow light and breezes to flow upstairs.

**15 SITING**  
 Key windows are oriented to capture breezes—“the most effective strategy to save on cooling costs in an air conditioning-dominated climate,” Pfeiffer says.



## Build green, save green

The notion that green-built houses cost a lot more just doesn't add up, says Pfeiffer. “They cost on average about 5 percent more,” he says. And ultimately, they save money on maintenance and up to 50 percent on utilities. So why all the fuss? “There’s simply a lack of knowledge about all the cost-effective options.” Thanks to solid budget planning, this house (at around \$200/square foot) was built for about \$50 less per square foot than comparable, conventional new houses in the neighborhood.

Ann and Mike’s utility bills might be the last word on the subject. In south central Texas, where triple digits are common in summer, “our electric bill has never been higher than \$180,” says Ann. “And at the height of winter, it might run \$97.”

## Changes for your home

To make an existing home more high-performance—saving both energy and money in the long run—follow Pfeiffer’s tips:

- Trade incandescent for fluorescent and LED lightbulbs. “Lighting is a huge factor in energy consumption,” Pfeiffer says.
- Add insulation to attic flooring, and if possible, to walls.
- Replace toilets and showerheads with low-flow ones and upgrade appliances to those that are Energy Star-certified.
- Repair or replace ductwork to ensure the home is properly sealed.
- Shade windows prone to excess light with awnings and make sure all windows are weathertight. ☞