Innovative Home: Getting Centered, Going Green

BY WILLIAM B. LEONARD
PHOTO BY MATT ROSE

Asheville is the epicenter of a green building boom, if you believe what folks in construction and real estate are saying. And Rob Moody's new eco-friendly or "green" house in Asheville's historic Montford neighborhood sits directly at the axis. At first glance, it's difficult to distinguish Rob's Craftsman-style house as a brand new construction among the older historic homes of his neighbors. Rob took care to ensure the architecture and styling were sympathetic with the surrounding houses, which all date from the early part of the 20th Century. "This is a historic district, so there aren't too many options available on how to place the house on the lot, but we took care not to take out too many trees," Rob says. "In fact, if you look at the house from the street, it's offset from the center so we wouldn't have to cut that tree down." He gestures towards a tall black gum tree, rather rare these days, especially for its size. "You just don't see black gums that tall."

Rob, who founded EcoBuilders of Asheville four years ago, says he takes care to preserve the landscape and the historic aesthetic with every house he builds — including his own. His 2,000-square-foot home isn't what most people might consider a showplace. But despite the modest size — in a neighborhood chock full of 5,000-square-foot Victorian mansions — his house is a model of green construction and high-tech gadgetry.

The dwelling sits on a concrete slab, but the house and the foundation were sited to ensure that water drains away naturally and doesn't create any erosion or silting problems. The home's pebbledash siding, consistent with the architectural style of Asheville and the Montford area, is both historically accurate and innovative in its design. "Pebbledash is kind of unique to Asheville, because it was really favored by Richard Morris Hunt [the Biltmore Estate's architect]," Rob says. "And I much prefer it to other exterior finishes like stucco." He explains that the exterior walls are a dual-layer design with wire mesh and a permeable material placed between the layers. The design allows moisture between the exterior siding and the inner walls of the home to drain down to the foundation and away from the structure.

"That's always been a big problem with siding like stucco and even pebbledash — if water gets trapped between the exterior and interior walls, you get mildew and also the

siding then tends to crumble," Rob says. "Houses should be considered living and breathing organisms, and I've made sure this house breathes like it should."

The great care that Rob took to design and to build his home has earned it certification from the NC HealthyBuilt Homes Program. According to Rob, a HealthyBuilt home is designed and built to reduce energy and water usage and protects the environment. The building materials used to construct the home must also reduce pollution and waste of natural resources.

"Most of the materials we used come from this area. Nearly all the wood is grown in managed forests and milled locally, and we have used as much recycled material as we could from other construction and renovation sites around Asheville," Rob says.

Rob's interest in conservation and protecting the environment was instilled at an early age as he grew up in Haywood County. Respect and love for the traditions, history and natural beauty of Western North Carolina has always been a part of his life, he says. So when he started a business renovating older homes in Asheville, he gravitated toward green construction techniques. He and his business partner Jackson Bebber have grown that passion into a thriving construction and real estate company.

"The demand and interest in green house construction just keeps growing," says Jackson. "And Asheville really is at the center of it all."

Rob's house proves that you don't have to sacrifice comfort or style when building a green and high-tech house. The house features smart technology that controls an advanced entertainment system that can pipe music to different sections. The home is wired so that he can suspend a television or a web camera from the ceiling of his kitchen. He's considering installing a webcam, so that he can check on the house whenever he likes from his iPhone.

With his cellular phone, Rob can even see what's on the television in the home's main room and change the stations remotely. But, he says with a laugh, he learned the hard way that changing the TV stations from afar isn't always such a good idea. "I did it once from my phone, but I changed it from something my wife was watching," Rob says. "Let's just say after the phone call from my wife, I won't be doing that again."

The home also has a Rinnai tankless water heater. Rob says the water heater works well and heats enough water to run three showers simultaneously. "It's extremely energy efficient, heats water on demand and doesn't have to reheat water constantly like traditional heaters with tanks," he says.

He estimates with the high-tech and innovative water heater that he spends around $15 per month to heat the water for his home. Combined with the state-of-the-art heating and cooling system and EnergyStar appliances, his home energy bill amounts to about $60 per month—or nearly 60 percent less than homes of comparable size.

"The key is that we're trying to lower the carbon footprint and environmental impact of this house, and I think we've met all those goals," Rob says. "Plus it's a nice house to look at and it's going to function well for my family for many years to come."