

Building
affordable,
healthy
environments.

by Sharise
Cunningham

Crafting an Earth-Friendly Home



NEW HOMEBUYERS EVERYWHERE want the most value for their money when purchasing what is likely the largest investment they will ever make. Most buyers get caught up in the excitement of choosing color schemes and countertops but rarely consider what happens after they move in.

Energy bills aren't sexy so they're not often part of the buying thought-process. A few environmentally and savings-conscious buyers will look for an Energy Star rated home, which assures them of a bare minimum energy-efficient home. But there's more than just low-emission appliances that can add to your home's efficiency and overall health.

EarthCraft House, a joint green-building program of the Greater Atlanta Homebuilders Association and the Southface Energy Institute, operates throughout the greater metro Atlanta area. Southface is not a group of over-zealous environmentalists; rather it is a non-profit organization that promotes the use of energy-efficient, affordable, and accessible home and work environments. The Southface office is itself a study in efficiency and conservation.

Built for the 1996 Olympics, EarthCraft House director, Jim Hackler, says that the office is 60 percent more energy-efficient than similar buildings. This includes not only the materials and methods used to construct the "home office," but also extends to the vegetable garden that is fertilized by the onsite compost pile and hydrated by harvested rainwater.

When the program began in 1999 there were 40 EarthCraft homes; today there are 700 with 1,000 more committed in the coming year. Due to builder demand, the program was recently adapted to include renovations and currently has eight home renovations in the pilot stage, Hackler says.

Carl Seville, vice president and owner of SawHorse Construction, is one builder that helped push to make the EarthCraft program applicable to renovations. Seville brings an existing home up to EarthCraft standards by implementing a whole house approach. "We have found that by spending a little more on insulation, we get

SAWHORSE recently completed this EarthCraft renovation. Company owner Carl Seville was instrumental in making the EarthCraft program applicable to renovations.



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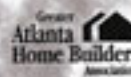


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- 50% of illness is either caused or aggravated by indoor air pollution (American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology).
- Indoor air pollution is one of the top 5 risks to public health (Environmental Protection Agency).
 - 50% of homes have problem molds
 - Indoor air is 2 to 5 and as much as 100 times more polluted than outdoor air (Environmental Protection Agency).
- In addition to air quality, 90% of the homes in America are 60% or less energy efficient.

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JIM HACKLER, EarthCraft House director, helped convert the Southface Energy Institute home office into an EarthCraft-friendly space.

a better result and have less work to do in other areas of the house," he says. "[We also use] high-efficiency bath fans, engineered lumber, high-efficiency windows, low [fume] paint, high-efficiency HVAC systems and extra sealing of the ductwork."

To win EarthCraft House certification, a home must be built by an EarthCraft Builder adhering to a 150-point rating scale. A builder seeking EarthCraft certification must be a member of the Home Builders Association, join the EarthCraft program and complete a one-day training course. Hackler says the homes are available at all price points, from Habitat for Humanity houses to \$10 million mansions.

A builder earns points in each of 12 areas that start from the ground up, ranging from site planning to energy efficient structures and appliances, to efficient use of design and materials, to homebuyer education. With the recent notoriety of toxic mold, perhaps one of the most important areas addressed is indoor air quality.

EarthCraft's Hackler says ideally, no newly built home should have mold problems. All homes should be built tight—properly sealed and ventilated—to prevent moisture buildup, the main cause of mold problems. In the south, moisture is a particular concern because of the humidity.

What many homeowners, and in fact builders, don't realize is that in the case of air conditioning units, bigger is not better. There is a propensity here to install oversized units with the thought they will

fight summer's heat better. Not so, Hackler explains. One-third the purpose of an a/c unit is to remove moisture, not to cool. An air conditioning unit waits until the water reservoir is full before it will drain and blow cool air again. Hence, having a unit that's larger than your home requires means your home is not cooling as efficiently as it should.

The EarthCraft House program ensures that properly sized cooling units are installed. And in the case of a renovation, units may actually be downsized. A larger home may be split into zones, each with a smaller unit as opposed to one large unit.

Jim Adair, managing partner of Starcraft Communities and recent EarthCraft graduate selected the program as a continuing education course to maintain his builder's certification. Adair's pilot project will be building his own EarthCraft home in the Chastain Park area. He agrees that a home built to EarthCraft pressurization and ventilation specifications makes it difficult for

mold to survive.

Unlike the visionary homes of the 1980s, an EarthCraft home doesn't have huge solar panels disrupting the roofline and there's no field of windmills in the backyard generating power. The home doesn't have to

It's what you
don't see that
makes an
EarthCraft
house what it is.

look like something from the future. "The thing about an EarthCraft home," Hackler says, "is it's what you don't see that makes it an EarthCraft house."

What a homebuyer gets in an EarthCraft

House is an affordable, durable, healthier, quieter, more energy-efficient home. The modest upfront cost difference (less than 3 percent over the cost of a standard home) is well worth the instant savings in energy bills and improved health from better air quality.

Seville says the cost difference is a little harder to determine for renovations because there are so many different types of renovations. However, he estimates the additional cost to range from about 3 to 7 percent. "There are usually many green methods that you can add on that take the house over and above the minimum standard for EarthCraft, and many homeowners are willing to invest the extra money to have their house clean, healthy and efficient," he says.

To learn more about how you can own an EarthCraft home or to become a certified EarthCraft House builder, contact EarthCraft House at (404) 872-3549 or visit www.earthcrafthouse.org.

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