

Your Alabama Home

MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR CORNER OF THE WORLD

Soul-Warming Wood

Your Kitchen Can
Work Harder
Savvy Storage Ideas

**Environmentally
Friendly Building**

Do You Need A
Remodeling Permit?





Indigenous materials, fiber-cement siding, and energy-efficient windows make this home environmentally friendly.

PHOTOS: TED TUCKER

going for the green

One Alabama builder shares his passion for green building—and his hopes that homeowners will embrace it.

Historically, homes were built in harmony with nature. They were positioned to take advantage of prevailing breezes and constructed of local materials. In the South, porches provided natural cooling. With the advent of low-cost energy, the development of air-conditioning, and the wide availability of building materials, there was no longer a need to work with nature. What advantage does a porch provide when you can just crank up the AC?

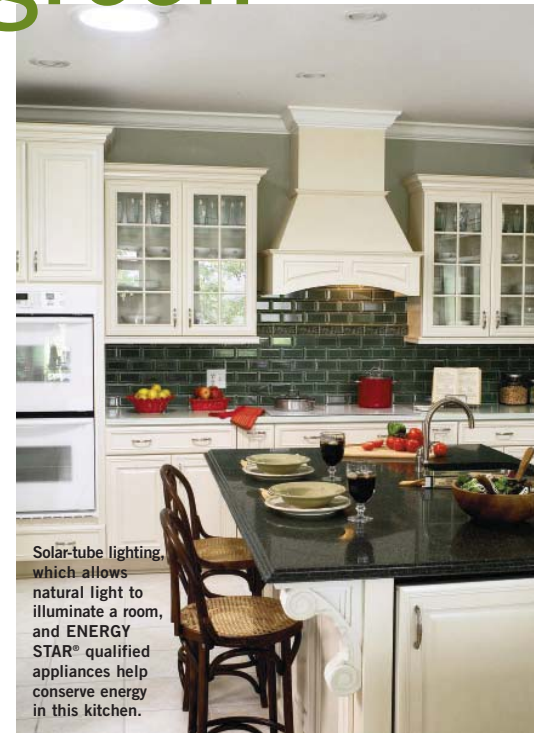
But rising energy costs, environmental concerns, and health issues have given rise to a new approach to building. “Green building” combines traditional methods with the latest technology to create homes that are energy efficient, environmentally friendly, and healthier to live in.

Declan Yearwood of Yearwood Construction, LLC, in Cullman, is an Alabama builder who’s embracing green building. “It offers many benefits to the homeowner, to society, and to the environment,” says Yearwood, who became interested while a student at Auburn University through the school’s Sustainability Initiative.

“For the homeowners, the main advantage is lower energy consumption, which leads to lower utility bills,” Yearwood explains. “In addition, they will have better air quality due to proper sealing of the home and the use of building products with fewer chemicals.”

Yearwood feels that building environmentally sensitive homes is a good way to differentiate himself from his competitors. “It is easier to showcase our skills when we educate the homeowner about our approach to construction and the benefits of living in a green home,” he says. “Customers realize that if a builder is willing to take the time and effort to promote green construction, (that person is) more likely to build a quality home.”

He believes that this approach requires educating both customers and subcontractors. “There is a learning curve,” he says. “It really does take a lot of time and effort on our part.” But once informed, many of his customers recognize the advantages of going green. “They like to incorporate as much as they can afford,” Yearwood says.



Solar-tube lighting, which allows natural light to illuminate a room, and ENERGY STAR® qualified appliances help conserve energy in this kitchen.

Although construction costs run about 8% to 10% higher, Yearwood feels that the energy savings alone will more than offset the initial costs. “Over time, a homeowner will earn a greater rate of return due to the increased cost of energy and the fact that they have hedged themselves against the increase. You can’t get a return like that in the market,” he adds. “Besides, if a home is energy efficient, it’s going to be more comfortable.”



LEFT: Declan (right) and Carlton Yearwood operate Yearwood Construction, LLC. FAR LEFT: The Yearwoods used a reclaimed-wood mantel and locally harvested stone for this fireplace.

One way that Yearwood improves energy efficiency in homes is by using heat pumps with a Seasonal Energy Efficiency Ratio (SEER) of 14, which include variable-speed compressors. Unlike conventional single-speed compressors that are either on or off, the variable-speed compressor will run longer in moderate weather, removing more moisture from the air inside the home. (An air conditioner only can remove moisture when it is on; a single-speed unit or an oversized unit will not run long enough in mild weather, allowing humidity to increase inside the home.) In addition, there will be less fluctuation in room temperature.

Yearwood also minimizes ductwork in the attic or crawl space. "You want it in conditioned space," he says. Instead of the usual aluminum foil tape used to join sections of ductwork, Yearwood uses mastic to ensure a better, more permanent seal. The use of mastic, although common for commercial structures, is seldom seen in residential construction.

While working on his first green-built home, Yearwood paid particular attention to reducing energy costs. "The main green aspect is the energy efficiency," he explains. "That's No. 1, but there are a lot of other aspects to green construction." His more recent houses also have included some of the sustainability aspects of green construction. "Other than the framing lumber, all the wood is local," he says. Yearwood also landscapes with native plants. "They require less maintenance and less herbicides," he says. He also works to ensure that the homes' footprints are minimally invasive to their surroundings.

For a custom builder like Yearwood, adopting these construction methods often occurs on a case-by-case basis. "Each house is different. It would be easier if you were a production builder," he says. (A production builder only designs and develops one green house, and then replicates it.) "Every builder needs to start thinking about it. We are going through natural resources like crazy."

Visit www.greenbuilder.com for more on green building and links to a number of sources. The U.S. Green Building Council (www.usgbc.org) and the Sustainable Buildings Industry Council (www.sbicouncil.org) sites also provide useful information. *Louis Joyner*

To learn more about the houses shown here, visit www.youralabamahome.com.

green ways

See an environmentally sensitive home in your future? If so, these guidelines will help you get started.

- Design for a specific site, and take advantage of shade, sunlight, and breezes.
- Keep the house footprint to a minimum to reduce impact on the environment.
- Make use of local materials such as wood and stone.
- Specify building materials that are low in chemical emissions, such as nontoxic, fungicide-free paints. Often, natural materials, such as wool carpet, will show lower chemical emissions than synthetic products.
- Incorporate sustainable building products, such as bamboo flooring or wood products, from certified sustainable forests.
- Consider the life-cycle costs of building materials. Over the life of a house, for example, a more expensive, durable material such as brick actually may cost less than cheaper material such as wood siding, which requires periodic painting.
- Recycle materials to minimize jobsite waste and disposal costs. Check the trash receptacles to see what employees and subs are throwing away. Work with local waste processors to recycle scrap wood and drywall.
- Make the home as energy efficient as possible.
- Use alternative energy sources such as passive solar heating and ground-source heat pumps.

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