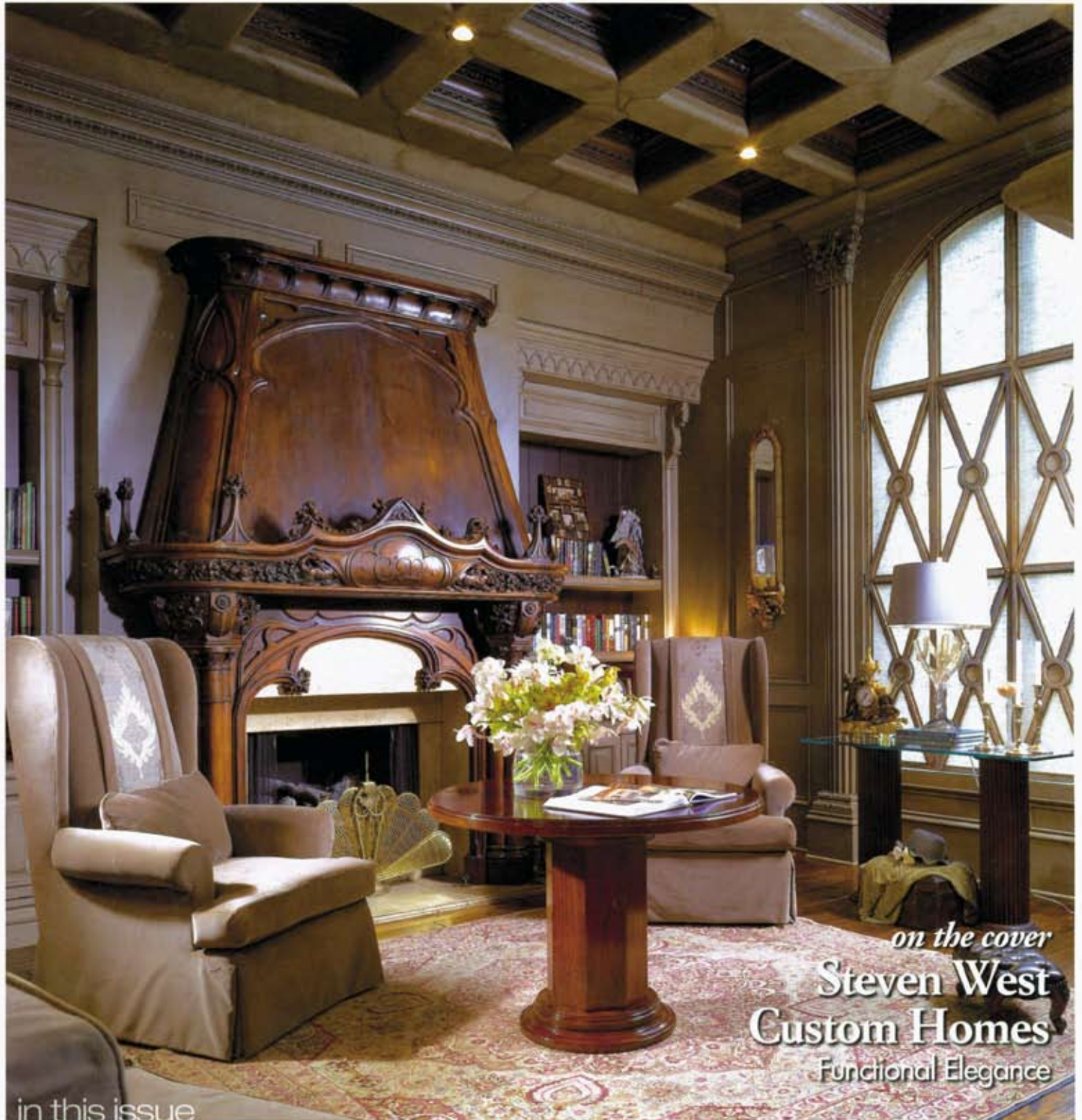


Today's CUSTOM HOME

ATLANTA'S COMPLETE GUIDE TO BUILDING OR REMODELING YOUR CUSTOM HOME • AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2008



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Our homes account for about 21 percent of greenhouse gases, so making them more efficient can make a real difference to the environment and in homeowners' personal health.



Going Green

Mainstream and Here to Stay

By William (Bill) Harrison, AIA, and Robert A. Tretsch III, AIA
Photography courtesy of Harrison Design Associates

Not so very long ago, the mention of a green home evoked images of architecturally bereft buildings made with bales of straw. Today, green building has become mainstream, with manufacturers of everything from structural materials to cabinets proving that you no longer have to sacrifice style for substance. We have worked on many projects which demonstrate that you can combine high design with environmental responsibility, whether you're seeking a modern loft or a traditional, classic home.

Why should you go green? First, because it's the right thing to do. Our homes account for about 21 percent of greenhouse gases, so making them more efficient can make a real difference to the environment and in homeowners' personal health. Second, many clients are almost there anyway. Clients often don't realize that the quality of construction in their custom homes - from insulation and appliances to HVAC efficiency - is already so high that they're close to the next step of being certified. Finally, there are financial benefits, both from a utilities standpoint while you're in the home and when it's time to sell. LEED-certified commercial buildings, for example, have a higher resale value than non-certified buildings. While LEED for Homes is too new to have comparable data, common sense dictates that there will be similar advantages. Rather than a vague assurance that a house is green, LEED certification gives homeowners a tangible set of parameters and a manual describing all the systems and materials in the house. It's almost like a nutritional label on a cereal box, letting you know what's inside, because much of the "good stuff" is concealed behind the walls. ▶



Much of the "good stuff" that goes into creating an eco-friendly home is concealed behind the walls, making green building a feasible choice for any style of residence, as these photos of EcoManor demonstrate. At bottom, solar panels were concealed on the roof so they are not visible from the street, while windows bring natural light into a central staircase.



Many of these hidden aspects of green building are addressed in the design phase. If a client says they want to build green, we first ask them how far they want to go. Then we get into balancing their sustainability requirements against their budget.

Design considerations start with site selection, where a previously developed lot is more desirable than a virgin site. They continue in how we site the home and its orientation to the sun. We'll design for passive solar as well as active and passive ventilation. One way we can do that is by placing functioning windows at the top of a stair tower to allow for natural ventilation. There are many ways to design a home to take advantage of natural heat and light. For instance, heavy walls in Southwestern homes soak up the sun during the day and radiate that heat back during cold desert nights.

In many cases, truly efficient design can be achieved by paying heed to the indigenous architecture. Before we had the technology to control our interiors, people developed ways of building that worked with the environment. Hence, in the Deep South, deep front porches and raised floors helped keep houses cool. Once we were able to control our environment through air conditioning, we began to ignore these historical precedents. As a result, you see a proliferation of brick ranches, which aren't the most efficient design for the Deep South. At the same time, a home should be what its owners envision. So if they want a Georgian or Tuscan, there are ways we can design and build that are appropriate to the architectural style yet still take full advantage of green building principles. The materials and systems that we select play a large role in that. When applying for LEED certification, homeowners will sit down with an independent provider, like SouthFace here in



Atlanta, who will determine if a home's design, systems and materials are sustainable and green. The homeowner then registers the property.

Right now, homeowners who are passionate about the environment are leading the way in green building. Ultimately, anyone who wants to leave a lasting legacy will be sure to follow. ■

Robert A. Tretsch III, AIA, spent 11 years at a major commercial architectural firm before joining Harrison Design Associates and becoming a project architect. This LEED Accredited Professional's work on high-end residential properties in California, Nevada, New Mexico and here in Atlanta gives him a wide perspective on sustainable design. Harrison Design Associates includes a team of more than 85 architects and designers who believe the handcrafted custom home is an individual work of art. The award-winning firm offers site planning, design, interior design, landscape architecture and construction administration and management. For more information, call (404) 365-7760 or visit HarrisonDesignAssociates.com.