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# It Isn't Easy Building Green, But It Doesn't Have To Be Ugly

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**Mystic** - A new 5,500- square-foot home with amazing views of the waters off Masons Island may appear at first blush to be another hangover from an era of excess.

But look closer: Instead of a manicured lawn out front, the property surrounding the house features native plantings and rugged boulders uncovered during excavation. On the roof, neatly tucked away on the south side, solar panels provide energy for the home's hot water system. And, underneath it all, four wells have been drilled for geothermal heating and cooling as well as a 6,000-gallon cistern

that stores runoff from the roof as part of an irrigation system.

Instead of going down in history as just another McMansion, this home will be remembered as a keystone in the nationwide "green building" movement and the first registered LEED house in southeastern Connecticut, its builder said.

LEED, an acronym for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, is a designation earned by just a few homes in the country and is based on a rating system that measures such ideals as design innovation, site sustainability, water and energy efficiency, use of sustainable materials and indoor air quality.

The large footprint of the Masons Island home gave the project team some major challenges, since LEED prefers homes to be smaller. But, through innovative designs for rainwater runoff, the planting of drought-tolerant greenery, the installation of eco-friendly toilets and faucets, the use of recycled and on-site materials as well as other efficient technologies, the home is expected to receive a mid-range LEED certification.

Yet the home, open last Thursday for a tour of professionals in the real estate, building and business community, is not defined by the technologies that went into it; it is not a slave to the sustainability movement. The four-bedroom house, which should be ready for occupancy in early December, includes plenty of luxury amenities, large rooms and an attractive, traditional design - just what the owner wanted.

"We had the same concerns as most other folks when we thought of 'green building,' mainly that we would sacrifice beauty and elegance for something more functional, and that would end up costing us a lot more," said a statement from the owner, who asked not to be identified.

In the end, though, the owner, whose family includes two children, found that "with new technology, you not only have a better quality of life, but you can have everything you want - it just requires a little more thought at the front end of it," he said in a phone interview.

"The question has changed, from 'Why would you do it green?' to 'Why wouldn't you do it green?'" said Chad Frost, principal of Kent & Frost Landscape Architecture in Mystic, which coordinated the home's landscaping.

Timothy O'Neill of Evergreen Fine Custom Homes in Old Lyme, the home's builder, acknowledged that going green costs anywhere from 3 to 10 percent more than conventional building techniques, but the savings down the road are substantial. The average LEED home saves 50 percent on energy costs, and the payback time for recouping some of the up-front costs can be as little as 10 years, he said.

Among the ways the Masons Island home has reduced costs is through the use of light-emitting diode technology in its outdoor illumination, passive-solar window placements,

Energy Star-rated appliances, energy-efficient windows, polyurethane insulation and a high-performance geothermal system that provides radiant heating and an advanced energy-recovery ventilation system.

"This is an industry game-changer," O'Neill said. "It's really fundamentally changing the way things are done. And it's really being pushed by the marketplace."

O'Neill said that, though this will be the first LEED home in the region, about 10 others are on the drawing board locally. By opening up the house for tours Thursday, the project partners - which included architect Duncan S. Milne - hoped to increase interest in green building and to put to rest any ideas that an efficient home has to look ultra-modern or ugly.

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*The home's large footprint created challenges.*



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*Stephen Johnson of A&B Cooling and Heating works on an air duct of a geothermal heating and cooling system in a new home on Masons Island in Mystic.*



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*A geothermal heating and cooling system is one of many environmentally friendly features of a new Masons Island house.*