

STYLE



Almost every detail of the house kept the environment in mind, down to the Cedar shingles (certified by the Forest Stewardship Council) and the EnviroShake roofing.

# High design, low impact

Look closely—this lake house is completely green, inside and out.

STORY BY ERICH VAN DUSSEN | PHOTOS BY MATT WITTMAYER

**P**lenty of dramatic homes are being added to Keuka Lake's quaintly cramped West Bluff Road, but one recent build stands out for having *less* impact.

What looks like an unassuming lake house is full of surprises: both in its cascading lower levels that expand the total interior space to 3,500 square feet and in its vast array of energy-efficient and environmentally friendly design elements. This "green" house has a backstory as impressive as its stunning lake views.

Jonathan Orpin, president of New Energy Works, made the dream home a reality for the Rochester couple that had lived part-time in the lot's original house for more than a decade before finally deciding to build new.

Founded in 1982, Orpin's company builds high-end timber frame homes with environmental touches

more subtle than windmills and solar panels, and with designs more playful and eye-catching than you might expect from a structure with so much serious eco-sensitive thought behind it.

Too often, Orpin says, environmental homebuilders forget to build "nests that people want to be in." But this West Bluff home manages to have it both ways.

The custom layout puts the bedrooms at street level, while a wide staircase heads down to larger rooms where the views steal the show. Downstairs, it's hard not to notice the elaborate multi-story decks that provide the house's indoor-outdoor lifestyle.

"Outside decking is always an environmental issue," Orpin says, pointing to the dilemma faced by homeowners who are often forced to choose from long-lived plastics, chemical-soaked pressure-treated

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Various types of wood used throughout the house were reclaimed from old barns, industrial timbers and mills. Local Sheldon slate was used in the kitchen.

wood or hardwoods like Ipe taken from the Brazilian rainforest. “But in our case ... we’ve got the best there is.”

He’s referring to the yards of reclaimed, unfinished redwood used for the decks and the floor-to-ceiling bottle racks in the wine cellar. That last use is appropriate given that the wood was originally used in Canandaigua Wine Company vats. Walking into the wine room brings an unmistakable, heady aroma that could only come from wood long soaked in reds and whites. The entrance to the wine room is shielded by an oversized barn door salvaged from the original home—another tip of the hat to conservation with style.

In addition to the redwood, New Energy Works’ Pioneer Millworks Division milled various reclaimed woods used throughout the house: Australian Jarrah in the kitchen counter and master bed frame, beech in the cabinetry, elm in the staircase, Douglas fir in the timber frame itself. Even wood from the original home is represented, with paneling and flooring in the rustic game room serving as a literal touchstone to the house that preceded this one.

Naturally, heating is a hot topic in a conservation-oriented domicile. A geothermal well on the property provides heat to the home, and a two-step process created better insulated walls: A layer of

cellulose (essentially, recycled newspaper) was applied between the wall studs, and a thin, continuous layer of rigid insulation keeps warm air from escaping through the studs.

“Heat seeks cold, so [the house’s] heat will always use the wood—which isn’t a great insulator—as a conductor, searching for a way to get outside,” Orpin explains.

Special low-emissivity window glass helps reduce heat transfer (read: cooler in summer, warmer in winter). But even more important, Orpin says, was the decision to reduce the amount of glass overall. “Less glass than what you might expect” for a lake home, he admits, although the effect



The mantle is antique foundation stone from an old barn. Windows were designed for lake views, but were kept relatively small to conserve energy.



of a series of tall but narrow windows still allows for a fine modified panoramic view. Even the dock lift is solar-powered.

All these design tweaks and high-tech innovations neatly balance environmental responsibility and relaxed luxury—a high-wire act that was an important goal of the homeowners. According to Orpin, the homeowners felt that if they were going to build a dream house, “it should be a house that leaves as small a carbon footprint as possible.”

To them, a green acre is the place to be.

*Freelance writer Erich Van Dussen is a frequent contributor to Rochester Magazine.*

