

EXPERT'S CORNER

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Living Green: Building Energy Efficient Homes



If the idea of a green home conjures up images of living in a tree house somewhere deep in a forested homestead, then you haven't seen Chuck Miller's eco-friendly homes. Miller was the first in the region to build an EarthCraft House, which he debuted at Homearama 2007. The property garnered considerable attention for its energy efficient building materials and techniques.

"The response was incredible," says Miller. "I'm working with five to six people right now who all want green houses. None of the green features were really new; it was just presented to the public where they could see it. Education is a huge part of what we need to do because people still don't know what green building is – they think it's out of their reach, that it's too expensive and it's really not."

Some of what Miller does is as simple as substi-

tuting fluorescent lighting for incandescent fixtures and using recycled carpet. Other options that he uses quickly pay for themselves in recouped energy costs.

"With the methods we use, we can now build houses tighter so they're more energy efficient and ultimately healthier. We have Low-E windows, conditioned crawl spaces and we use polyfoam insulation so you don't have the mold and mildew growing in the walls that you find in older homes. Everybody's starting to go with tankless water heaters or solar water heaters – I think the days of tanked water heaters are numbered. We've installed green roofs and we can use geo-thermal heating and cooling.

"Obviously it's more energy efficient to run houses that are green. They cost less to actually operate. The energy efficiency of the green houses is probably the most important thing in my opinion. Plus they're better

for the environment – you're conserving resources."

While green homes can be big Homearama-style houses, they are expected to be average-sized houses constructed with green techniques, says Miller. He is building a 2700 sq. ft. home in Virginia Beach and recently conducted a duct blower test to check the leakage of the ductwork. "In a typical house, there's 18-25 percent leakage in the duct system," he explains. "We had 1.5 percent leakage in this house."

In Hampton Roads, buyers are beginning to see more eco-friendly housing choices, so if you're interested in a green home, let your builder know says Miller.

"If I was a buyer, I'd want to know what green measures my builder is taking to make sure that my house is healthy, conserves resources and is energy efficient. I've heard of builders offering a 'green pack-

age,' so ask if they have green options or if they incorporate green building techniques.

"We just started a Green Building Council in the Tidewater Builders Association, and we are designing it to help educate consumers as well as contractors, developers and associate members about green building and what they can do to promote green building and incorporate it in their houses.

"The demand is there – people want it. Green is hip. There's a whole generation of kids that are more energy conscious and aware of what it takes to conserve resources, and that's great. Building green is definitely not going away anytime soon."