

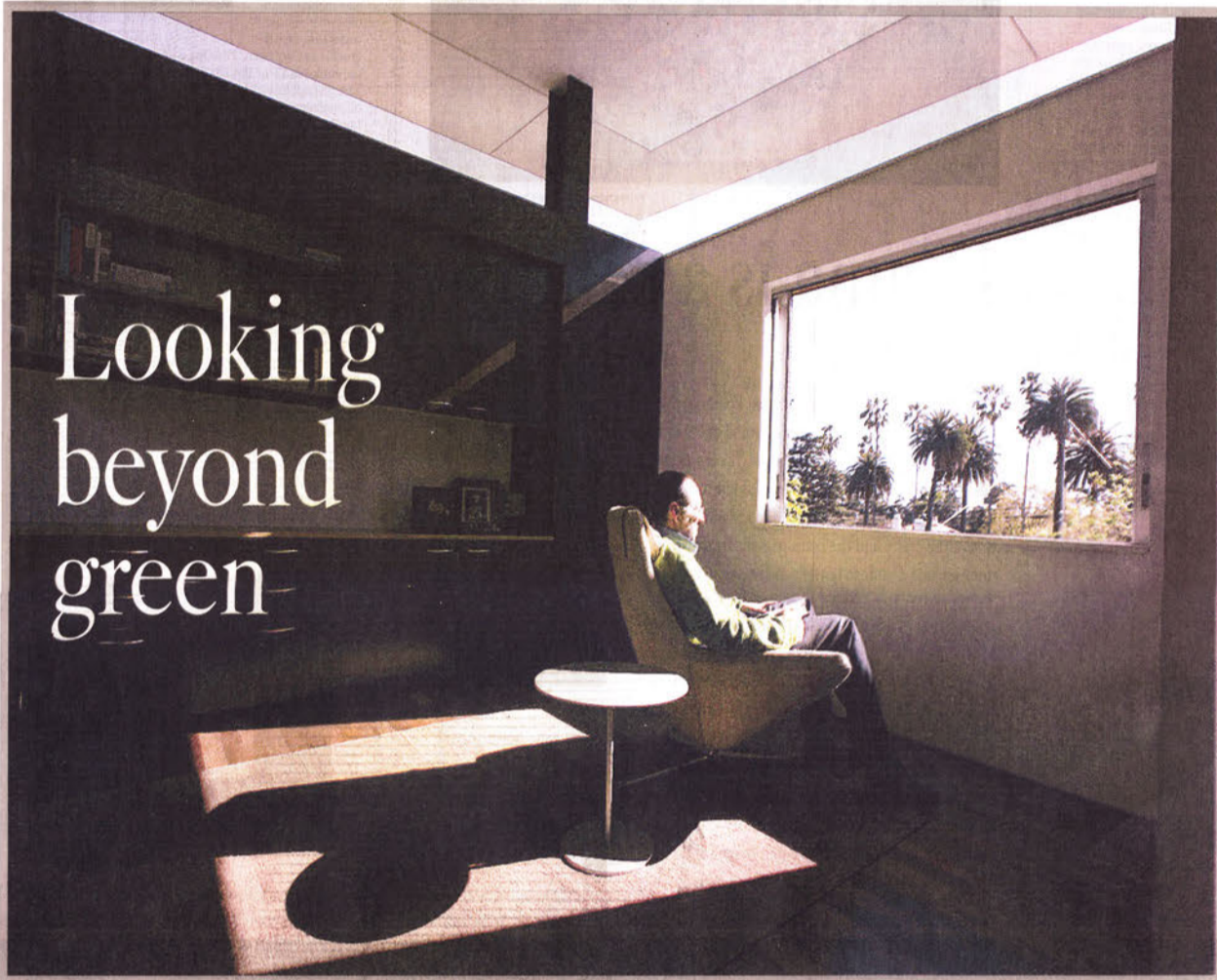
A "Queer Eye" guy flies solo.
PAGE 4

Thursday, March 29, 2007

latimes.com/home

ARCHITECTURE

Looking beyond green



ALLEN J. SCHABEN Los Angeles Times

Eco-friendly houses used to be clumsy, idiosyncratic and all about the message, but architects are discovering stylish approaches to sustainable designs. For one Santa Monica couple, home is more than just a soapbox.

By MORRIS NEWMAN
Special to the Times

BOB BEITCHER says he and his wife, Carol, want their newly built home in Santa Monica to be a showcase of sustainable practices "without being granola-y, if you know what I mean." Their house off San Vicente Boulevard has been carefully designed by architect Warren Wagner to optimize solar energy and the use of recycled and renewable materials. Yet the modernist dwelling seems more about the panache of architectural possibilities than the virtuosity of green design.

Seen from the busy boulevard, the facade is energetic yet understated, as if it had power in reserve. The hip-looking exterior is covered in Western red cedar, stucco-covered block and unfinished sheet metal. The upward-tilting roof seems to float above ribbon-like windows at the ceiling line, without external supports.

A closer look, however, reveals that the house is sustainable down to its foundation. A two-story opening in the center acts as a thermal chimney, pulling the hot air out of the house while drawing in cool air, all through an automated skylight. The walls are insulated with recycled denim, made from the remnants from a blue-jeans factory. Twelve photovoltaic panels supply 85% of the home's power needs, while 10 solar thermal panels supply the house with hot water and radiant heat for the floors and heat the swimming pool.

"The primary thing is that the house has an architecturally interesting design, and the punch line is that it's got all these sustainable design features," Bob Beitcher says. [See Green, Page F10]



DON KEISEN Los Angeles Times

OUTDOOR ORIENTED: Bob Beitcher, at top, looks out from his bedroom. Above, sliding doors open onto a deck.

GREEN AND GREENERY: Clockwise from below left: Cabinets in the master bedroom are made of plyform wood originally used for concrete form work; the second-story floor is made from the wood of palms that are too old to bear fruit and would otherwise go to waste; a ribbon of window offers a view of San Vicente Boulevard from the second-floor landing.



DON KEISEN Los Angeles Times



DON KEISEN Los Angeles Times



DON KEISEN Los Angeles Times

ARCHITECTURE

Eco-chic makes its way home

[Green, from Page F1]

His interest in green design was sparked a decade ago when a house designed by Wagner arose in his neighborhood. "I was dragging everyone over there to see it," he recalls. When the family decided to build a new house, sustainability seemed preordained. "It never occurred to us to do it any other way," says Carol, whose four children include a vegan chef. Their children also "had plenty of input" on the design of the house, she adds.

The Beitcher house is the latest in a series of recent Westside houses — Dugh + Scarpa's Solar Umbrella house, also in Venice; Ray Kappe's prefab house in Ocean Park; and the Ehrlich house in

Santa Monica by John Friedman Alice Kimm Architects — that have excited interest for their design and sustainable features. The combination of architecture and environmentalism is the credo of Wagner, who founded W3 Architects in Venice in 1993 to "demonstrate the integration of solar and sustainable technologies into the highest level of architecture." He earlier earned his graduate architecture degree at UCLA and worked for several years with passive-solar-design pioneer Edward Mazria in

Santa Fe, N.M. Wagner also is a modernist who counts R.M. Schindler, the Viennese-born architect who created many boldly geometric homes in the hillsides and canyons of Los Angeles, among his artistic heroes. He calls his own style "warm Modernism." "Architecture is about one form doing several things," he says. The shape and siting of the Beitchers' house on a corner lot is a case in point. Rather than position the house in the center of the lot, as most architects do, Wagner pushed the house north, almost to the sidewalk on San Vicente, to maximize the size of a south-facing

courtyard and to capture as much sunlight as possible. This long-and-narrow configuration also fits the Beitchers. An open plan makes the living room, kitchen and dining room — all furnished in comfortable contemporary furniture by interior architect Tracey Loeb — into a single, continuous space. The sliding-glass doors open onto a courtyard that unifies the garden and pool with the living areas. The result is a communal setting for the close family. The Beitchers have two teenagers living at home and two adult children. As if to make a witty commentary on the close connection between the living room and the courtyard, Wagner lo-

cated the fireplace outdoors, where it takes the form of a decorative fire pit, with a bed of black sand. The surrounding terracescape was designed by Sasha Tarnopolsky of Dry Design. The shape of the house also provides privacy. The rear of the house has a separate entrance that leads to a second-floor breezeway that opens into a guest room, which the Beitchers call "the crash pad," available to their adult kids on visits. The rear entrance allows visitors to enter the house at all hours of the night without disturbing the rest of the family. The 4,000-square-foot, four-bedroom house is large enough for Carol to have a separate room for quilting. Located on the shorter side of the L-shaped floor plan, this room allows Carol, a confessed "clutterbug," to work in her own space. The west-facing wall gives her a full view of the courtyard and the living room. "You can be aware of all the activity that is going on in the house," she says.

Bob and Carol's bedroom is upstairs, above the quilting and media rooms. The master bath features rough-hewn carved limestone on one wall, a slatted floor of sustainably farmed Pauap wood and a shower lined in honed limestone. Also upstairs on the landing is a sunny room with windows in three directions plus a skylight that offers an unobstructed view of San Vicente and the joggers on the central median. The landing is furnished with a daybed and a low table, where the Beitchers plan to plow down and read together.

ALTHOUGH Bob Beitcher, who is president and chief executive of Panavision, counts a shower home, his aim is to make the house into a demonstration of green living. The house is scheduled to be featured on three tours (see accompanying story) even before the owners have fully moved in. Despite all the green materials and special techniques, the house cost \$310 per square foot to build, not including the cost of land or landscaping. The interior finishes are part of that demonstration: Amber bamboo flooring has been used to clad the ceiling (it was difficult to apply, because workers had to make the ceiling perfectly flat before installing the flooring upside down) but the material wins compliments from visitors. The interior stairs are made of wood harvested from palms that are too



DON KEISEN Los Angeles Times

old to bear fruit and would otherwise go to waste. Even more radical, for this high-end house, was the choice of comparatively humble strawboard — a composition material made of compressed straw — for their kitchen cabinets and shelves in the TV room. The kitchen cabinets have a clear finish that highlights the material's natural light brown, gold-flecked color, while the TV room shelves are stained a bluish gray. "We were blown away by how quiet and dignified it looks," Carol says.

The choice of unusual materials is one of the issues that Wagner says most excites him about sustainable architecture. "Sustainability brings in a whole array of new materials to use," he says. "Some are cruddy looking, some are OK, and some, like the straw board, are very good looking." "The fact that the early homes were made of high-mass adobe set them apart as alternative architecture," says Richard Schoen, professor emeritus at UCLA and one of Wagner's former instructors. Passive solar technology, he adds, became associated with the

A SPLASH OF COLOR: Green tiles are used for the backsplash in the kitchen.



DON KEISEN Los Angeles Times

UNUSUAL CHOICES: The kitchen features amber bamboo flooring — on the ceiling. The cabinets are made of plyform wood, or compressed straw, a humble material that still looks elegant. A sheet metal wall, CaesarStone counters and porcelain tile flooring complete the room.

counterculture and its anti-modern, utopian ideas. By the 1980s, passive solar housing "ceased to be an issue, period," Schoen says. "There were two or three generations of architects who had no idea as to what constitutes passive solar design." The growing awareness of global warming has helped architects embrace energy-saving design and construction. The construction of homes and buildings, coupled with heating and cooling of these structures, contributes to about 50% annually of greenhouse gas emissions in the U.S., according to the American Institute of Architects. The new standard is the zero-energy house, a dwelling that consumes no more energy than it produces. Solar pioneer architect Maria, Wagner's former employer, has started an organization known as Architecture 2030, to promote the zero-energy goal, while the American Institute of Architects and other professional organizations have started their own emission-reduction programs. "Now, we are coming full circle," says

QUIET ENVIRONMENTALISTS: Above, Bob and Carol Beitcher have long been interested in green design. At left, a thermal chimney that pulls hot air out of the house and draws in cool air doubles as a skylight over a reading area.

Look inside the 'green' home

"Greenies," architectural and design buffs and the newly environmentally conscious can get a firsthand look at the Beitcher house inside and out during three tours over the next two months:

- Friday:** CA Boom 4 architect-led tour of Santa Monica homes. \$75 for the shuttle tour, includes admission to the design show at Barker Hangar at the Santa Monica Airport, 3021 Airport Ave. The first shuttle leaves Barker Hangar at 11:12 a.m., the last one at 2:30 p.m. The buses run continually in between. Reservations strongly suggested. For information, call (310) 394-8000, www.caboom.com.
- April 28:** Third Annual Santa Monica Green Gardens Tour, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Advance tickets \$30, tour day \$40 (\$25 for seniors), van tour \$60. Proceeds benefit the Virginia Avenue Project. Tickets and information are available at (310) 264-4224, or at www.virginiaavenueproject.org.
- May 10:** Venice Art Walk Architectural Tour. Self-driven, docent-led tours of green homes in Santa Monica and Venice, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., featuring works by John Friedman Alice Kimm Architects, Warren Wagner, Ray Kappe, David Hertz and Victoria Yust. Tickets are \$50. Proceeds benefit the Venice Family Clinic. www.venicefamilyclinic.org/index.php?view=art_architecture.

MORRIS NEWMAN

Although Bob expects to entertain many of his friends and contacts in the entertainment industry at the house, he does not see Carol and himself as standing on a soap box for green design. He thinks the house will speak for itself. "We prefer to be quiet evangelists."