

Home transformed

buyer's snapshot

John & Becky St. John

THIS WEEK: Green house, great home

Whether two can live as cheaply as one is debatable, but the St. John family has found that five can live as cheaply as two in a “green” home.

Last August, when John and Becky St. John moved their family into an eco-friendly home near Lake Grapevine, they hoped they'd see lower utility bills.

Although the St. Johns and their three children hadn't lived in their home for a full year, Becky says they already have proof that the green-building practices employed by their builder, Ferrier Custom Homes, are paying off.

The family's electric usage has dropped dramatically, as has their gas bill, even though this home is substantially larger than their previous one.

What kind of magic did Don Ferrier perform to make the home so energy efficient?

He used structural insulated panels, SIPs, instead of the standard wooden frame construction. SIPs sandwich a thick layer of foam plastic insulation between

two chipboard sheets, creating a strong, energy-efficient building system.

“Both John and I have parents and grandparents who were alive during the Depression and we were taught not to waste anything. Natural gas prices shot up in 2001 and we thought an energy-efficient home would pay off in the long run,” Becky says. “When this 1-plus-acre property came up for sale, we thought we might not ever get another opportunity to build the house we envisioned in Grapevine.

“John's uncle in Conroe had built an energy-efficient home using structural insulated panels. When we researched them, Don Ferrier's name came up.”

Even though the St. Johns incorporated green-building ideas into their home's design — such as energy-efficient windows, concrete floors, a high-performance

cooling system and the SIPs — the house doesn't look like a futuristic, minimalist home that some might equate with energy efficiency. Rather its farmhouse styling is completely in keeping with the historic feeling that's an important part of Grapevine.

“We wanted people to drive by this house and wonder whether it had always been here,” Becky says.

Now the St. Johns are living their green dream.

Next week: In addition to building a home that meets green-building standards, the St. Johns have incorporated a few lifestyle changes to help their entire family enjoy environmentally responsible living.

— Debra Howell



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