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PHOTOS BY IAN JACKSON, THE JOURNAL

An energy-efficient home can still look beautiful, as with this house built by Effect Home Builders at the corner of 145th Street and 98th Avenue.



Plenty of windows allow light in this Craftsman-style home.

## Modern materials, old-fashioned charm

Craftsman design helps polystyrene blocks, solar panels fit into neighbourhood

JANE CARDILLO  
Special to The Journal  
EDMONTON

Les Wold gets a kick out of peoples' reaction to the house his company built in the west Edmonton neighbourhood of Crestwood.

"They come by on bikes, walking their dogs and they stop and they compliment the house," says Wold, one of the owners of Effect Home Builders.

"They ask, 'Is this a renovation?'" Indeed, the gracious two-storey, inspired by Craftsman-style dwellings of the 1930s, fits seamlessly into the ravine community where many of the houses were built more than half a century ago.

With its wraparound covered verandah, inviting dormer windows and exterior stucco coloured the soft green of a

forest glade, the home appears as old as the towering evergreens that shade its front door.

Inside, the illusion of age continues: a bed of coal glows softly in the parlour's cast iron gas fireplace; a graceful claw-foot tub adorns the ensuite in the master bedroom.

Cherrywood floors gleam underfoot like vintage sherry, and sloped ceilings, stained glass transoms and multi-paned windows complete the aura of bygone charm.

"We wanted something that fit the area," says Wold of the showhome that opens today at 14504 Mackenzie Drive. "We wanted to add to the neighbourhood."

House designer Katherine Ball remained true to the early 20th-century style, but also gave it a modern appeal.

"We wanted the open concept in the house, but we wanted to give it the old-fashioned look of the 1930s," says Ball, pointing to the archway with stained glass transoms that divides the living/dining area.

"One room is open to another but divided off in colour scheme and in feel, but not divided off in conversation and sight lines."

The shaker-style interior doors are solid wood; the loft at the top of the stairs opens to a balcony.

"It's traditionally called a shake balcony," says Ball. "It's where you would shake your quilts and get them aired." Every finishing detail was picked with careful intent.

"I chose the pewter hardware and I chose the doorknobs because they have a more rubbed and more antique look," says Ball. "They're pewter rather than brushed nickel because that would be a little too bright looking, not as old looking."

There is more to this house, however, than its abundant visual and architectural delights. The latest green technology gives the charming 1930s replica superior energy efficiency.

Think, your genteel granny on steroids. Two solar panels on the roof provide about 70 per cent of the home's hot water needs and a highly efficient boiler system replaces a conventional furnace.

Dual flush toilets help conserve water, triple-paned windows lock in heat and in-floor radiant heat warms the basement.

Ball positioned the living/dining area on the south side of the house to take advantage of passive solar heating. The kitchen on the north side is shady and



Architectural details add ambience to rooms.

cool, but opens onto the bright living area.

The mudroom off the side entrance also serves a greater purpose. With its slate floor and beadboard wainscoting, it has the look of a traditional back porch, but it protects the house from the elements.

"They would call this an airlock, but in an old house we would call it a back porch and the back porch was very smart," Ball says. "It kept cold air from getting into the house."

What boosts this dwelling into the realm of hyper energy efficiency, though, is something visitors won't even see. From foundation to rafters, the exterior walls are made up of interlocking polystyrene blocks filled with concrete. The combination gives the home extraordinary insulating values.

"It's nearly twice as insulated as a standard two-by-six woodframe construction," says Wold. "Basically the (concrete form construction) has an R value of 23 and the R value of the wood frame would be 13 or 14."

That's good news for homeowners looking for relief from high energy costs, says Wold, who moved his family into a concrete-form house a year ago.

"Our heating costs have been drastically reduced from our previous home," he says. "It has cut the heating nearly in half."

Not only does the house stay warm in winter, the concrete keeps it cool when

outdoor temperatures rise.

"There is no need for air conditioning," Wold says. "It stays cooler in the summer because of the thermal mass of the concrete. It cools down at night and then it slowly releases that coolness during the day."

Besides energy efficiency, the 12-inch-thick concrete walls give the homes a unique design feature, says Wold.

"One way that you can tell that it's a concrete form house is because of the nice, deep window sills," he says. "Everybody notices them, people love them. You can sit plants on them, cats love to perch up there."

The houses cost about 10 per cent more to build than conventional homes, but "they're worth it," says Wold. "You definitely see that value back, not only in your reduced energy consumption but also in the comfort and the longevity of the home. They're built to last centuries."

It all makes for a new-age twist on the grand old houses of yesteryear.

"One of the things I visualize is you're drawing your bath in a clawfoot tub," says Wold.

"You turn on these old-style taps and the water you're drawing is being heated by the sun."

"It's a beautiful combination."

■ The benefits of a concrete house / 16



A claw-foot tub nods to the past, but much of the house's water is heated by the sun.



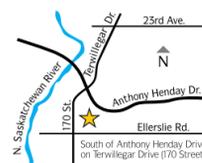
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# Concrete walls a solid choice for construction

Insulating Concrete Forms are warmer, quieter, safer, and longer-lasting than other conventional building materials

JANE CARDILLO  
Special to The Journal  
EDMONTON

A concrete house is not only more energy efficient, it's safer and quieter than a conventionally built house, says a spokesperson for a company that manufactures one type of insulating concrete forms.

Doug Dyck of Plasti-Fab, the company that provided the insulating concrete forms (ICF) that Effect Homes Builders used in its Mackenzie Drive showhome, says a concrete house poses less of a fire hazard than a conventionally built dwelling.

The exterior walls of an ICF house are made up of interlocking polystyrene blocks that are then filled with concrete. Inside walls are generally finished in dry-wall. Pretty much any finish, including stucco, siding or brick, can be used on exterior walls.

"With half-inch drywall, they've got a three-hour fire rating," Dyck says. "It would take three hours for fire to actually penetrate that wall."

Dyck points to the fires last summer in Edmonton's MacEwan neighbourhood that destroyed 18 homes and damaged 76 others.

"If one of those houses had been ICF, it would have stopped the chain," Dyck says. "So from an insurance perspective, it's definitely much cheaper."

Concrete homes are also phenomenal at deadening noise from the outside world.

Dyck says they have a sound transmission classification of 55, compared to 32 for a conventionally built dwelling.

That makes for a lot of peace and quiet, says Ed Kalis, director of technical services and training for the Alberta Ready Mixed Concrete Association.

"If you had a truck parked outside and it blew its horn, you wouldn't hear it in the house," says Kalis.

"If your neighbour is cutting the lawn you won't hear it. The only sound trans-



Cherrywood floors and multi-paned windows add an aura of bygone charm to this Crestwood home.

PHOTOS BY IAN JACKSON, THE JOURNAL

mission is through the windows."

The homes are so sturdy they can withstand severe batterings from the elements, too, says Les Wold, one of the owners of Effect Home Builders.

Aside from the windows, the homes are tornado resistant, he says.

"There's vertical and horizontal rebar running all throughout the concrete and it's all one monolithic structure, so it's not moving."

Kalis calls the homes environmentally friendly.

"Concrete is a very sustainable product,



The kitchen on the north side is shady and cool.



Sloped ceilings add to the vintage look of this gracious two-storey.

houses, are good for the planet in another way, says Wold.

"They're built to last centuries," he says. "They're there for the long term and that's an environmentally friendly component too, that once they're built they last."

## Gorgeous tillandsia must be world's most intriguing plant

Mary Praznik

'Lush' doesn't properly describe this unusual tropical plant that requires no soil



Mounting tillandsias on driftwood gives a more natural setting.

SUPPLIED

I have to pinch myself—the day has arrived. After so many false starts, the tillandsias are here.

They are so gorgeous; there are many in the order that I have never laid eyes on. The colours and shapes are unusual, really not comparable to any other plants.

They are, in fact, from a different world: the world of true tropical plants. To call them lush is an understatement.

They are, without a doubt, the most intriguing plants in the world. They do not require soil or transplanting, but live on their hosts, without drawing nourishment from the trees to which they cling. Their roots are for staving off gravity, for without roots they would surely fall from their perches high above the forest floor. Dropping to the earth would be sudden death, as there is no light that can penetrate the massive canopy of foliage above.

Tillandsias love light. They must have

dappled shade in summer, but it must be strong light for them to survive. Northern exposure or eastern sunlight is fine, but south light in summer will cause scorching to occur.

Allow tillandsias to grow outside in a protected area; they love the great outdoors.

However, they must be protected from falling temperatures, as 12 C is about as

“Tillandsias will grow anywhere; on the wall, wood or even a plaque, and they only need light, air and nutrients to stay alive.”

far down as they can handle. On the other hand, the temperature may rise to 40 C and the tillandsias do not seem to be troubled that much in the heat.

Hang them on a wall, mount them on wood, place them upon a plaque—they do not care. They are definitely the easiest of plants to grow.

Look closely at them, as they are full of surprises. As I was fastening the sales tags onto them this evening, I noticed tiny little baby tillandsia species clinging to the body of another unrelated species of tillandsia.

They will grow anywhere. They only need three things for success: enough light, water and nutrients to stay alive. All day, as people were moving in and out of the greenhouse, they

were overheard saying, "They just live on air. You don't have to do anything to them."

This is just not true, however. It is a popular misconception, and I would like to set the record straight.

They do need water, they do need light and they do need nutrition to keep looking great.

What they do not need is soil; they do not need to ever be transplanted or have a bigger pot. They will be quite happy strung on a wire, hanging in a north- or east-facing window.

If you are looking for that perfect gift to give the person who has everything, tillandsias are IT! They are available hanging, mounted on driftwood, displayed on wood plaques and even perched on beach coral.

They do make the most wonderful presentations, and all recipients are guaranteed to be surprised. They are much more impressive than a tie or a pair of socks.

Check your nearest garden centre to see if tillandsias are available. Because of where I work, I know they're available at Ellerslie Gift and Garden.

If you would like to comment or ask a question about plants, feel free to contact me at [mary.praznik@hotmail.com](mailto:mary.praznik@hotmail.com)



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