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BY MARA DER HOVANESIAN (P.70)

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37

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The Greenest House on the Planet

Steve Glenn's LivingHomes sets a new standard in eco-friendly homebuilding

BY CHRISTOPHER PALMERI

It waters itself. It powers itself. If only it could take out the trash. Entrepreneur Steve Glenn's ultra-energy-efficient house in Santa Monica, Calif., is the first home in the country to be given "platinum" status in the U.S. Green Building Council's influential LEED rating system (for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design). Glenn, the founder of Web software firm PeopleLink Inc., worked for more than two years on the project, hiring Los Angeles architect Ray Kappe to lend his earthy blend of California modernism to the design.

For Glenn, the two-story, four-bedroom structure (about 2,500 square feet) is more than just a place to live. It's the prototype for his new business, LivingHomes, which sells prefabricated houses based on his model for about \$250 per square foot. That price doesn't include land, site preparation, or transportation of the components, which brought the total cost of Glenn's home to more than \$1 million. The bulk of the house was built at a factory in Santa Fe Springs, Calif., and assembled in one day. A high-speed video of the installation can be seen at the company's Web site: www.livinghomes.us.

Glenn says the eco-friendly features added about 20% to the base cost of the home. Even by saving an estimated \$1,500 a year on utility bills, he won't make up the difference anytime soon. But for Glenn, the point is to live in a home that causes the least damage to the environment. Living healthy also counts, so the paint he selected gives off next to no volatile organic compounds, and the largely steel and concrete construction inhibits mold and termites. "We're targeting consumers who buy organic food, do yoga, and shop at Design Within Reach," he says. ■



HOT WATER A panel of glass tubes, manufactured by Apricus Solar, is positioned on the roof. Water pumped through the tubes is heated by the sun and stored in an insulated tank for use in showers and sinks. Hot water is also circulated through a series of plastic tubes embedded in the house's floors. This radiant heating system is more energy-efficient than forced air and doesn't spread pollen, dust, or germs. It also keeps your toes toasty. Cost: about \$33,000.

VENTILATION A "whole house" ceiling fan from Tamarack Technologies pushes hot air out of the home. Of course, living by the beach doesn't hurt—Glenn's house doesn't need air conditioning. Cost: \$1,200.



FIREPLACE The Fire Co.'s EcoSmart fireplace burns denatured alcohol from a special receptacle. Because it produces minimal smoke and other waste gases, it doesn't need a flue. The chimney in the living room actually houses electrical wires and plumbing.



RECYCLED WATER Rainwater collected from the roof and yard is stored in a cistern buried under the house. So-called "gray water" from the sinks and showers is run through an underground filtration system consisting of asphalt, rock, and soil. Both sources are used to water the rooftop garden and grounds. Cost: \$20,000.



LIVING ROOF A garden of deer grass and other native plants will help insulate the house, keeping it cooler in the summer and retaining heat in the winter. Designed by Great Outdoors Landscaping, the living roof cost \$8,000.

ELECTRICITY On sunny days, a photovoltaic panel from Schott Corp. puts out 2.4 kilowatts of power—up to 80% of the house's needs. Owners can sell any surplus energy back to the utility. The system cost \$12,000 after \$13,000 in state rebates and federal tax credits.

LIGHTING Bars of bright light-emitting diodes from American Permalight, used throughout the house, require one-tenth the power of incandescent bulbs. Cost: \$95 per bar.

WINDOWS Double-pane glass from Pilkington Group and sliding doors by Fleetwood Windows and Doors help conserve energy. Glass walls let in more natural light, cutting electric bills. Cost: \$33,000 for the entire house.