

The Future *of* Tradition

A new Golden Valley home
brings cutting-edge energy solutions
to a time-honored architectural style

By Colby Johnson



CABLE ROOF:
The traditional
cross-gable roof of this
corner-lot home creates
two fronts.

Would you rent your home if you had the option to own? Probably not. So why would you rent your energy if you could own it?

This is the question that motivated custom homebuilders Rocky and Gigi DiGiacomo to build the Traditional Home for the Future—a 4,200-square-foot, nearly zero-energy home on a wooded one-acre lot in Golden Valley that was named 2011 Green Dream Home by Xcel Energy and the Builders Association of the Twin Cities.

“We all know utility bills aren’t going down,” says Rocky, owner of DiGiacomo Homes & Renovation, Inc. “Sustainable design makes financial sense. It isn’t just about caring for the environment. The future is here right now, and it pays for itself.”



The 4,200-square-foot Golden Valley home features a vast open living space, allowing light to flow in from both the front porch and the rear screened room. Architect Ryan Fish, AIA, used extensive enameled built-ins, cabinetry, millwork, and trim throughout the living area to reinforce the traditional aesthetic.

But zero energy was only part of their goal. They wanted to break the mold of what people typically assume a green home looks and feels like. "We didn't want to do the zero-energy home with the corrugated metal and the ultra-modern aesthetic," says Rocky. "With this home, we set out to show that sustainable design doesn't have to be paired with the aesthetics most people are used to. We wanted this to be a very traditional, upper-middle-class home that's all about quality but was also zero energy."

To bring their vision to fruition, they first teamed up with TEA₂ Architects (for schematic design) and then completed the project with Ryan Fish, AIA, a LEED-accredited architect who is now with Peterssen/Keller Architecture but was working independently at the time. "It was an ideal partnership from the start," says Fish. "As



Opposite: Although the exterior exudes "classic Americana," says Fish, with its traditional pillared porch at the front entry, this home is highly futuristic, with cutting-edge renewable-energy technology.



TRADITIONAL HOME FOR THE FUTURE

Location: Golden Valley, Minnesota
General contractor: DiGiacomo Homes & Renovation
Clients: Rocky and Gigi DiGiacomo (builder of spec house); Dung and Karen Troung (homeowners)
Size: 4,200 square feet
Cost: \$1.3 million with land
Architect: Ryan Fish, AIA
Completion date: November 2010
Principal-in-charge: Ryan Fish, AIA
Photographer: Paul Markert Photography
Project lead designer: Ryan Fish, AIA

both the client and the contractor, Rocky was so committed to the vision and mission that we were able to accomplish amazing things with this home. We worked the traditional design with an open floor plan around the sustainable features, and the result really speaks for itself.”

The initial footprint of the story-and-a-half home was organized around the 22 solar panels that would generate more than 50 percent of the home’s electricity. The corner-lot house essentially required two fronts—its north and west sides—and the solar array needed a steep, south-facing, out-of-view roof to capture sunlight. The team’s solution? Crossing gables with two long ridgelines that create a roof area for the panels that can’t be seen from the street.

“We wanted all of the zero-energy features to be under the hood,” says Rocky, citing the home’s geothermal heating and cooling system, LED lighting throughout, exceptional insulation, and energy-efficient appliances and windows. “These aren’t sexy, in-your-face features. Sustainable design is all about function; it doesn’t have to dictate aesthetic.”

“The home takes some character from Tudor homes, utilizing a steeply pitched roof to minimize large dormers needed to create additional space on the upper level,” says Fish, adding that the second floor—four bedrooms and two bathrooms that all radiate out from a comfortable family room—is much larger than the main level. The master bathroom



The kitchen boasts Calacatta marble counters, ebony-stained bamboo flooring, handmade Motawi tiles, and stainless-steel Energy Star appliances.

Opposite: The master bath (top) is a thoughtful mix of modern and traditional. The upstairs living area (middle) was designed to provide an informal space for the family to relax. The wooded corner lot (bottom) adds to the home's timeless feel.

Right: The 22 south-facing solar panels, hidden from the street, generate more than 50 percent of the home's electricity needs.

is an upper-level gem, effortlessly juxtaposing traditional finishes and fixtures with clean, modern lines and materials.

When selecting exterior materials, the developer and the architect also took inspiration from neighboring Cape Cods and ramblers. They used what Fish calls a modern interpretation

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In keeping with traditional design, the home's main entrance opens to a staircase, but a turn to the right leads to an open plan for the living room, dining room, and kitchen. Tucked behind the kitchen are a spacious pantry and a mudroom with easy access to the double tandem garage.



FIRST FLOOR



SECOND FLOOR



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of board-and-batten siding to make the lower-level stucco feel less heavy. "We found creative ways to make it look richly detailed," says Fish, noting that the window casings are actually flattened board and batten as well, which reinforces the home's clean lines. "We also incorporated unifying elements throughout the exterior, such as a wood band that wraps around the entire home."

To further connect the home to the site and the neighborhood, two porches bookend the open floor plan, creating an airy, light feel and flow throughout the main floor. An open porch with pillars faces the street, and a nearly identical screened porch sits in the back.

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"An open floor plan was an obvious choice. People today don't live compartmentalized lives," says Rocky. "The kitchen isn't a little utilitarian room off in the corner. It's now the center of the house around which family life revolves. We wanted the space to feel traditional but accommodate how we live today." Just as life revolves around the kitchen, so do the living spaces, which are subtly divided by traditional architectural detailing.

"We are very proud of this house," says Rocky. "Oddly, the most satisfying thing about the whole project is the fact that the family who bought it wasn't initially drawn to the zero-energy features. They just fell in love with the home, and from there we were able to convince them that the sustainable elements are worth it. That tells me that we really accomplished our mission." **AMN**

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