One green project LEEDs to another

Alta's first certified green log home sets the pace

By Ronda Mollica

Take a virtual tour of Alta Log Home's Greenbriar LEED certified model at: **www.hometalktours.com/view/1282**

Energy efficiency in today's home is a must. Producers and builders are constantly creating new techniques and technologies to make log houses eco-friendly, and the use of recycled and environmentally acceptable materials is a natural tie to log homes.

Going the next step and fully embracing the principals of Leadership to Energy and Environmental Design (LEED), developed by the U.S. Green Building Council, was the goal of Alta Log Homes. The LEED system measures the impact of the entire building on the environment. The path to LEED certification for a home is a long one, beginning with the purchase of the lot and ending with the design of the landscaping.

Alta began its "green" journey four years ago when the company began to build EnergyStar-rated homes as a way to stand out from the crowd. Today, the New York company has built more than 50 EnergyStar-certified log homes, and its commitment to eco-friendly homes will result in a certificate from the USGBC — Alta is the first log home builder to receive the LEED-H for

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Homes certificate in the country.

It was a team effort involving both local and nationally known experts, says David Mann, vice president of Alta Log Homes. The company began working with Steven Winters, an EnergyStar rater for the Home Energy Rater System, to design energy-efficient homes.

"After achieving success, I thought, 'Why not go one step further? Let's try to build a LEED-certified home,'" Mann says. "We began by placing a written request to the USGBC to be a pilot for the LEED for Homes program."

"The benefits of living in a LEED-certified home are endless: Better indoor environmental quality, having more efficient mechanical equipment, appliances and lighting, and having a tighter building envelope, therefore controlling outdoor pollutants from entering the home and lower energy bills," Winters says.

From a bigger-picture view, having less impact on the environment through reduction of greenhouse gases escaping into the atmosphere, decreasing waste throughout the building process, and incorporating more environmentally preferable products into the home is the ultimate goal of LEED certification and green building, Winters says.

"Alta decided to create a practical home that the average person would want to purchase, not something from outer space," says Mann. The model, named the Greenbriar, was built in Fleischmanns, New York, near Catskill State Park.

"The model had been successful with EnergyStar and we fine-tuned it by choosing a lot with southern exposure, adding solar photovoltaic panels for energy savings, installing a whole house air exchanger and using sustainable materials like logs from a managed forest. Other green products like bamboo floors and top-of-the-line low-E Andersen windows were perfect additions to this LEED home."

All Alta Log Homes are made from white pine or red cedar logs that have been air dried, thus eliminating toxins caused by the kiln drying process used by many other builders. Unlike traditional stick-built homes, there is no waste, Mann says; every part of each log is used, and leftover materials become recycled into mulch for gardens and farm animal bedding.

The adjustments added about 10% to the overall cost, says Mann. "But as time goes on and these practices become mainstream, the differential should be about 3-5%," he says.

The interior of the home is finished with eco-friendly Sansin stain and warmed by passive solar energy. Greenbriar also features an advanced EnergyStar package that includes a highly efficient heating system, photo-voltaic panels for solar power, and innovative fluorescent lighting fixtures that use up to 50% less energy.

The Humidex that exchanges the air in the home six to seven times a day creates a healthy interior space, adds Mann. Radon remediation built into the foundation helps protect from radon gas. Water-efficient top-of-the-line fixtures not only save money but conserve valuable water resources.

The home has since been sold, but will continue to serve as an example for further LEED projects.

RESOURCES

Producer: Alta Log Homes, Halcottsville, NY, www.altaloghomes.com

USGBC LEED-H Provider: Steven Winters Associates, Norwalk, CT, www.swinter.com

Humidex: www.humidexhome.com

Sansin: www.sansin.com

Teragren bamboo floors: www.teragren.com