

Starting a Green Home Tradition

BY MELANIE SUNUKJIAN

Within the growing trend of green home renovation is the implementation of photovoltaic systems, or solar panels, for residential energy usage. On a large scale, each summer the Department of Energy hosts the Solar Decathlon, which brings 20 college and university teams to the National Mall to build and display their own energy-efficient solar-powered houses. But on a smaller scale, we're starting to see solar energy emerge right here in our neighborhood.

Hill Resident Christina Ann Porche has owned her Northeast home near 14th Street and North Carolina Avenue for over 10 years. But coming from a family of engineers, she had been dreaming about renovating it since 2005 when she was living overseas and renting it out. And her public affairs work in Liberia involved ecological efforts, so a "green" renovation was definitely on her mind.

After negotiating and signing a contract with a local construction firm, the vendor produced permits but later filed for bankruptcy and took her five-figure deposit with them. Once she moved home, she put out a request on the Moms On The Hill (MOTH) yahoo listserv for recommended and trustworthy contractors and after several consultations, selected fellow Hill resident Phil Campbell of Traditions General Contracting. She also hired architect Paul Wilson who was flexible enough to work as much as possible with the existing plans.

Before beginning the big renovation, a small series of corrective projects needed to take place first. That gave Christina time to stumble upon a grant for a DC government renewable energy project funded by the Department of Energy that would provide almost \$6,000 for a photovoltaic system on a residential roof. Using her public affairs communication skills to draft a proposal, she shared her own desires for other green components (like ceiling fans, LED lighting and low energy windows), secured the funding, and selected Green Brilliance to furnish the solar panels.

The big project finally broke ground on September 2008, and the grant funds were released shortly thereafter. The entire endeavor included an addition with a bedroom for her young son, an extra guest bathroom and a rooftop deck for entertaining. The backyard and carport were fenced in and a lovely spiral staircase connected it altogether. They used green materials whenever possible including rubber gaskets, fiber cement siding, low VOC paints and adhesives and glass infused wood for a rooftop deck.

One of the most notable green elements is a passive thermal solar design incorporated by architect Paul Wilson. Using a variety of materials, he planned out the addition's infrastructure to collect, store and distribute solar resources for heating, cooling and daylighting. With large south facing double-pane windows, very little electricity is needed to light the rooms, and the warmth of the sun is soaked up into the dark colors and natural building materials to radiate heat well into the evening.

A number of personal touches include Christina's choice to use formaldehyde-free insulation and nontoxic pressure-treated wood due to her environmental allergies. She was able to furnish the entire



bathroom countertop and backsplash with a discounted scrap of granite. And her son, Isaac, loves the cork flooring in his room (purchased from the leftovers of a fellow MOTH's home renovation project) because it is soft and warm in the wintertime.

As in every renovation project, some unexpected challenges did surface including a complete upgrade of the electrical box, a variance filed with the city to address site size issues, and careful siding installation to prevent any liabili-

ties with the neighbor's property. But despite the interruptions and changes, the project was completed and passed inspection in January 2010.

Christina has (mostly) enjoyed the green home renovation process and looks forward to the benefits of saving energy and money in years to come. She particularly appreciated that Phil and the Traditions crew worked very hard to maintain effective communication with her. During a month-long trip to southeast Asia, Phil took extraordinary

measures to ensure that she was appraised of any unexpected elements and kept the project moving forward with her continued approval.

In the future, Christina will be hosting two grant-required open houses and her own extra outreach activities to increase the awareness of renewable residential renovations in the community. She has invited students from Maury Elementary School to visit and learn about solar technology and plans to extend the invitation to other local schools and universities. She will also be applying to be part of the 2010 Washington DC Home Solar Tour.

Though Traditions General Contracting has always included green components in their renovation work, this was their first experience with a photovoltaic system, and they are eager to do more. Phil is excited to work with Hill architect Jennifer Fowler on a green roof for another local resident in the near future. After five years of transforming Hill homes, their "quality results, quality work ethic" has grown them a positive reputation in our neighborhood.

Christina, Paul and Phil each hope that their experience doing a solar renovation will encourage other Hill residents to follow suit and incorporate green solutions in their home makeovers.

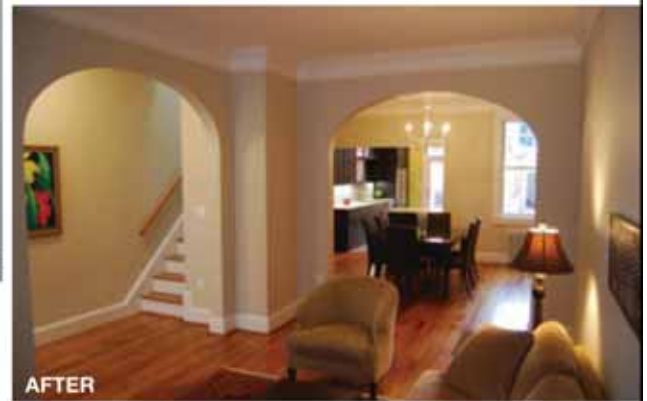
To contact Traditions, call 202-536-4769 or visit www.traditionscontracting.com.

For more information on the benefits of photovoltaic systems, go to www.greenbrilliance.com.

For more information on energy saving tips and incentives in DC, go to www.energy.gov. ★



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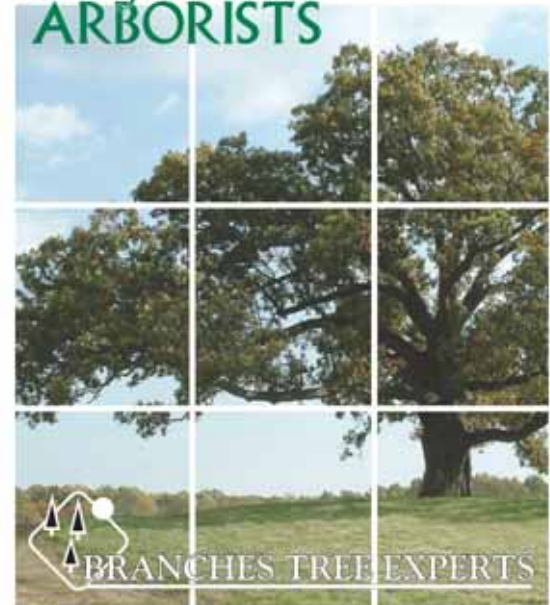
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