





Reshaping Lake Country

A couple's dedication to **sustainability** grew as their nest began to empty, and it eventually **blossomed** into a Minnesota GreenStar **showcase** that also helped shape their company.

BY MOLLY GUTHREY

Someone once observed that Pete and Sue Jacobson's garden grew like it was on steroids.

Steroids?

Not in this green garden and home in the Minneapolis neighborhood of Linden Hills.

"It's just organic soil and a twice-annual compost tea application," says Sue Jacobson. "The landscape is only four years old, but it has really matured."

For the Jacobsons — who run a residential construction and remodeling business — this 2007 project represented a new way to grow.

"As we started learning about the green movement, we just really embraced it as a company," Sue says.

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SPACES | 43



Inside, eco-friendly practices continued, including locally quarried stone, energy efficient appliances and hardwoods certified by the Forest Stewardship Council, among other things.

AN EMPTY, GREEN NEST

As their nest began emptying out in 2007, the Jacobsons thought about how they wanted to live.

“We decided it was time to downsize, because we were not going to have any children living with us full-time,” Sue said. “But we wanted to stay in our Linden Hills neighborhood, which we love. So we bought a property about five blocks away.”

With a green philosophy in mind, Lake Country Builders took apart the site’s existing home by hand so that the materials could be reused and recycled.

In its place, the couple built their “Lake Country cottage” designed to Minnesota GreenStar standards, a residential building standards and certification program created by Minnesotans for Minnesotans. Appearing as home No. 110 in the 2008 Parade of Homes Spring Preview, the two-story, three-bedroom home was a way for the Jacobsons to showcase their emerging specialty of sustainability. This is something they’ve built on in the years since.

“We have included as many aspects of the GreenStar checklist into our building process as we could,” Sue says. “On our specs, we have highlighted — in green — all the green processes we do as a company. Even if someone decides they don’t want to spend more on, say, a tankless water heater, they know they will still get green practices if they work with our company.”

Among their own home’s green features:

- A metal roof
- James Hardie fiber cement siding and energy-efficient Marvin Windows
- EnergyStar appliances and water-conserving fixtures
- Geothermal heating and cooling system
- Locally quarried stone
- Hardwoods certified by the Forest Stewardship Council, Marmoleum flooring (an eco-friendly linoleum), formaldehyde-free cabinets and low-VOC (volatile organic compounds), water-based finishes.

From the screened-in back porch, the Jacobsons can enjoy views of their low-maintenance plantings. Below, the dining and living rooms.



GREEN THUMBS

When it came to their new yard, which is the size of a typical lot, the couple brainstormed their landscape with Bob Renaud of Southview Design.

"They wanted to stay true to what it meant to be a GreenStar Gold Home," Renaud said.

This meant thinking about water.

"Pete wanted to capture the rainwater, so we came up with a unique irrigation system," Renaud says.

This system captures rain runoff from the metal roof, channeling it via rain barrels to help irrigate plants in the yard.

"It works beautifully," says Renaud.

The couple can enjoy their outdoor setting from a variety of vantage points: the open front porch; a screened porch off the back of the house; or on their patio located off the back porch.

"They wanted a couple of areas to sit outside," says Renaud. "The screened-in porch has a fireplace and is a natural place to gather."

The porch looks out over a cobblestone-like patio, which is actually a concrete paver product.

"That's where the grill is, and there's a long bench as well as another seating area," Renaud says.

Sue enjoys gardening as well as entertaining.

"We have a lot of planting beds, but it's mulched native plantings and a drip irrigation system," she says. "It's getting to the point where it's all pretty low maintenance."

Her husband also doesn't need to spend as much mowing anymore.

"He can get it done in about 15 minutes with an electric mower," she says.





In the landscape, the Jacobsons "wanted to stay true to what it meant to be a GreenStar Gold home," said Bob Renaud of Southview Design.



DOWNSIZING — AGAIN?

The Jacobsons finished building their green showcase home just as the real-estate market was crashing. Now that things are looking up, Sue is dreaming a little(r) dream.

"I love the house," she says. "I guess the only thing we might do if we were to sell it — when the market is right — we would like to downsize a little more."

If they do, they'd like to incorporate more passive-energy construction practices, with options to incorporate other environmentally friendly systems. Passive homes are sustainable and efficient through smart building practices.

For now, though, she — and her hydrangeas, raspberries and herbs — are blooming where they're planted. ■

Molly Guthrey is a frequent contributor to Spaces.