

the green



beneath

Three individuals, one goal: building on green foundations to build a cleaner planet

What is LEED?

- LEED stands for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design and is under the auspices of the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC). LEED recognizes development projects that successfully protect and enhance the overall health, natural environment and quality of life in the community. It provides guidelines and tests in five key areas: sustainable site development, water savings, energy efficiency, material selection, and indoor environmental quality.

- Volatile organic compounds (VOCs) are emitted (off gassing) as gases from certain solids or liquids, including a variety of chemicals, some of which may have short- and long-term adverse health effects. Concentrations of many VOCs are consistently higher indoors. Examples include: paints and lacquers, paint strippers, cleaning supplies, pesticides, building materials and furnishings, office equipment such as copiers and printers, etc.

- The LEED Neighborhood Development program encourages developers to promote Smart Growth and green building by reducing land consumption and automobile dependence, promoting pedestrian activity, improving air quality, decreasing polluted storm water runoff, and building more livable, sustainable communities for people of all income levels.

- Energy Star products are certified by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Department of Energy as the best products to conserve energy, save money and protect the environment. According to the EPA, Americans who used Energy Star products and appliances in 2006 saved enough energy to avoid greenhouse gas emissions equivalent to those from 25 million cars—all while saving \$14 billion on their utility bills.

TEXT Crystal Lee Thurston
PHOTOGRAPHY Tim Brown



Ritzau Residence

Some people plan their houses with an eye on keeping up with the Joneses. Local couple Tom Harned and Kirsten Ritzau just want to build a house that is in line with their beliefs and is healthy to live in.

"I guess when I think about the news that I hear—the global warming, the environmental degradations—I think the awareness in our country and in the world in general is increasing to sustainable, reusable, renewable products and systems," says

Harned, explaining the inspiration behind their home.

Completed in August, the 4,200-square-foot Hailey home is reaching for the pinnacle of low-impact living based on a designation called LEED. LEED stands for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, a green rating system developed by the U.S. Green Building Council. Achieving one of the highest levels of LEED certification will mean the home has met the highest criteria in environmentally correct home building today. The couple may go even further by achieving a net zero energy home, meaning that through environmental systems, they will produce as much energy as they consume. An added benefit will be no utility bills. In fact, the power company will pay them back for energy they produce beyond what they use.

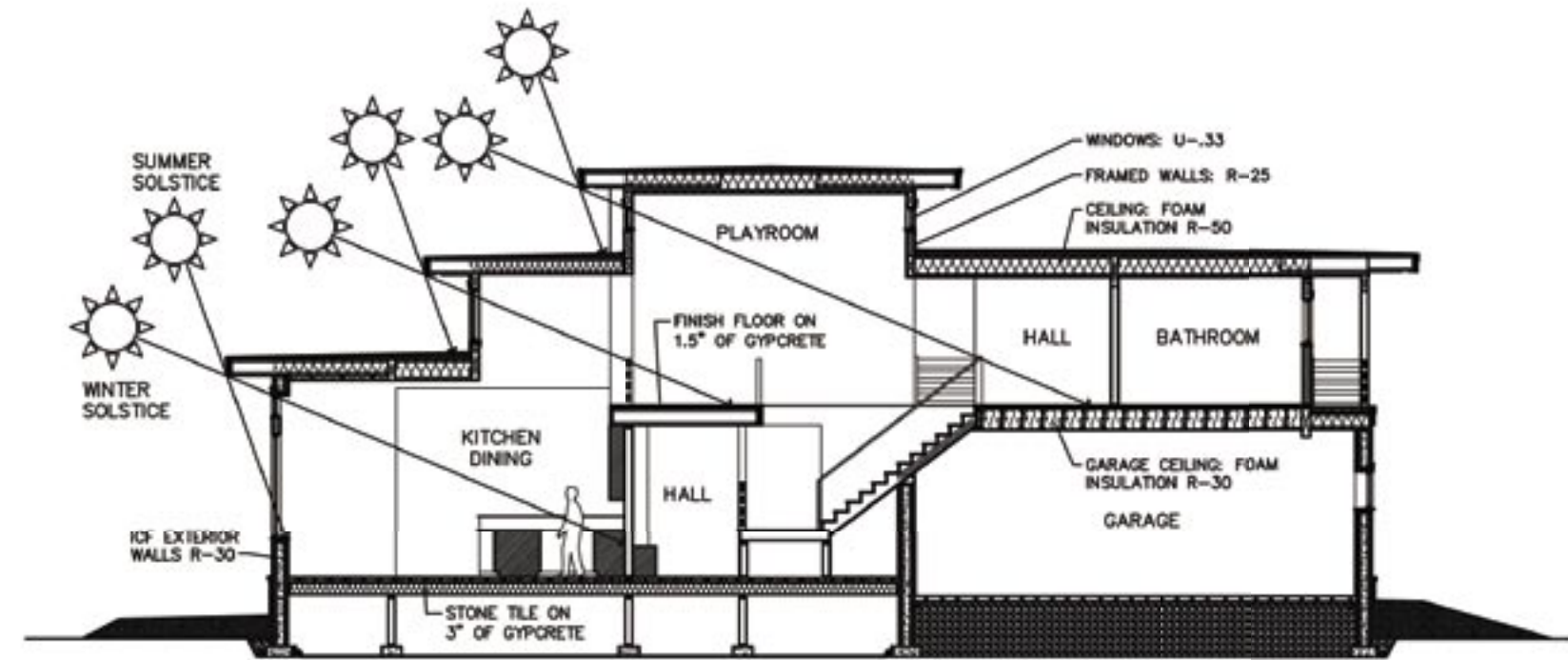
With lofty goals in hand, the couple turned to local architectural designer Rebecca Bundy and her husband Morgan Brown,

a solar energy system designer and LEED consultant at Sun Valley Solar, who guided them through the LEED process to create their green dream.

"You need to start during the very roughest planning stages because there are LEED points for your site location," Harned has learned. The family chose a site that is walking distance from local markets, schools, restaurants and stores, which is not only convenient, but also earns them points for reducing automobile fuel consumption and being closer to community.

According to LEED and environmentalists, the site work should have as little impact on the environment as possible, protecting natural resources and habitat, preserving as many trees as possible and, hopefully, planting even more. Besides preserving some of the beautiful old cottonwoods along the nearby Big Wood River and planting an orchard, the family will have a xeriscape garden with native plants and grasses requiring less water instead of the usual blue-green grass which, as Ritzau says, is "native to Kentucky," not Idaho, and requires an excess of water in this dry environment.

As for the architectural design, Bundy created an Arts and Crafts, Frank Lloyd Wright-inspired home. Its flat roof is a series of stacked rectangles and squares that mimic the beauty of the craggy Carbonate cliffs beyond. The house was constructed of insulated concrete forms (later clad in cedar) instead of the usual wood frame. Accord-



NORTH-SOUTH SECTION

DEPICTING SUMMER & WINTER SUN ANGLES & MASS IN FLOORS. LIVING AREAS ARE LOCATED TO THE SOUTH, UTILITY AREAS TO THE NORTH. HOUSE IS INSULATED TO 35% BETTER THAN STATE ENERGY CODE REQUIREMENTS.

ABOVE Architectural designer Rebecca Bundy was asked to design a LEED certified home from ground zero to what you see at left.

ing to Bundy, this makes for much better insulation and creates a house that may last for "many hundreds of years." A trickle-down effect has been that banks are starting to offer green mortgages and green loans at better rates because of the durability of the homes. "They last longer and work better," Brown explains.

One of the most important design elements of green building is the actual positioning of the home. Passive solar design for our cold winter climate situates the home to capture the most energy possible from the sun. Here, an expansive southern exposure with many south-facing windows captures the winter sun while a carefully designed roof overhang keeps the house cool when the sun is high in the summer sky.

"When the sun is lower in the sky in winter, this whole room will get filled with sunshine," says Harned. That way the family is using natural solar energy, not using up non-renewable resources to keep the home warm or cool.

"People say it's more expensive to build green and some aspects are," comments Ritzau, "but if you just do a few things early, like designing to maximize southern exposure, you save money and resources in the long run."

The materials used to construct a house are an important element of passive solar design. Explains Harned, "If you also provide mass, heavy structures inside your home, like concrete floors, a rock

fireplace, plaster walls or stone countertops, all those materials will absorb the heat of the sun and slowly release it. We have a concrete floor and stone countertops. We will have a fairly massive fireplace and a tile floor so, yes, we do have enough mass inside the house to absorb the heat. The denser the material, the warmer it will stay after sunset, whereas wood will lose the heat fairly quickly."

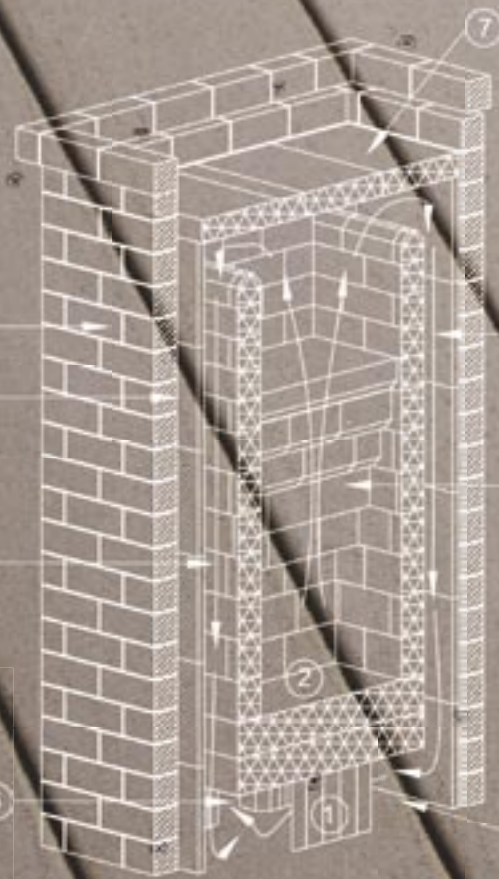
The thermal mass of the concrete, stone and tile also absorbs the cool mountain air on summer evenings to keep the home comfortable during the day. Opening windows in the cool evening (and closing them during the warmth of day) naturally cools the house too.

"Sun Valley has an ideal climate for passive solar," says Brown. "Lots of sun when it's cold and cool mountain summer nights. A properly designed home here should need little additional heating in winter and no air conditioning in summer." With fewer windows to the north and west and overhangs situated properly, the home stays comfortable naturally.

Some people use trees or a trellis placed strategically in the west to block the hot afternoon sun's rays. "If we gain too much heat during the autumn," explains Harned, "we have trellises designed that can be installed and then planted to keep the lower angling sun of autumn out. It's pretty cool. You plant something like hops or some other vine and when you want the warmth in spring, the plants are

ContraFlow Masonry Heater

1. Heater Base
2. Firebox
3. Downdraft Channel
4. Updraft Channel
5. Horizontal Channel
6. Exhaust Gas Outlet
7. Capping Slab
8. Exterior Stone
9. Expansion Joint
10. Firedoor
11. Air Intake



ABOVE

LEFT Sketch courtesy of Norbert Senf, Masonry Stove Builders

fireplace—a massive structure that sends the heat a number of different ways before it goes out the chimney. It's a much more efficient system of gaining heat out of wood. Most fireplaces burn the wood and the heat just escapes up the chimney. With this one, it has to travel around through all the chambers and heats up the whole mass around the fireplace." The fireplace needs to burn for only one of every 24 hours. The heat gets stored in the concrete resulting in a slow release, naturally modulated temperature expression which is far more comfortable than a blast of heat from a forced air system.

Both Harned and Ritzau realize that building so environmentally sustainable a home means nothing if one's lifestyle within it is overly indulgent.

"You can throw a lot of money into solar panels," comments Harned, "but if you don't conserve the energy inside your house—if you leave all the lights on (even when they are the energy conserving compact coiled fluorescent lights they will install), you will just be sucking up all that energy and wasting it, more or less."

Appliances must likewise be efficient, echoes Ritzau.

"It's great to have solar panels but make sure they're not just feeding energy hogs," she cautions. Most of their appliances will be Energy Star approved, meaning they are rated the best products made to conserve energy.

It's not just environmental health, however, that has inspired Harned and Ritzau. The human health aspect is extremely important to them as well. Years ago, Ritzau, now a successful real estate agent, worked in a small office next to a copy machine and developed bad allergies from the toxic air. With two young children now, she wants to make sure the air in her home is clean. To that end, during the construction process, the couple

still growing and therefore let sun and warmth in. When it's high summer, the eaves keep the high angles of the sun's rays out, and in the autumn the plants have thickened and help keep the rays out and shade the house. This way the interior is shaded from most all rays except the desirable low-angle winter ones."

Two solar heating panels on the roof will heat the water and a large array of solar electric panels will supply all electricity needs in the home. Floors are heated hydronically (circulating warm fluids underneath). But what happens when a long snowstorm hits and there is no sun for the panels? The Harned/Ritzau family has backup systems just in case, like an efficient fireplace, a woodburning furnace in the garage and gas, but their most important source of heat is still the sun.

"This fireplace is kind of a fun one," says Ritzau, enthusiastically pointing out a main backup heat source. "It's called a masonry heater



used products that have the least amount of volatile organic compounds, or VOCs, which are emitted from certain home products like finishes and paints in a mostly odorless but possibly detrimental gas. Choosing lower VOC products will reduce the release of toxins into the air, resulting in healthy air not only for the homeowners but also for the construction workers along the way. Once they inhabit the home, the couple plans to support that fresh-air foundation by employing green housekeeping products to clean the home.

"For me, air quality is non-negotiable," Ritzau says emphatically. "Carpeting is one of the most toxic things you can have in your house. Carpet is also a place for dust mites that are a huge allergen. We're going to have a minimum amount of carpets all with natural backing and wool underpads instead of the usual rubber pad that will off-gas forever. People are saying that green homes are healthier to live in literally because you take into consideration the air quality."

In addition to eco-friendly carpets, they are using hard, renewable surfacing like bamboo or cork flooring, which they will have upstairs.

An exciting aspect of this whole process for the couple is being a part of introducing innovative new green technologies to the Valley that may inspire others.

One of the latest technologies is their use of constructed wetlands—the first in the state—to augment the normal septic system. The wetlands appear as a patch of lush green plants near the home that naturally purify wastewater, while at the same time providing an attractive landscaping amenity. The system replaces the normal septic method of leaching effluent into the earth that may contami-

nate water sources. Instead of disposal, it is a natural purification process of polluted water. After passing through the system, the clean water can be used for irrigation or simply left to recharge the aquifer without pollutants.

Designed by John Grove—a biologist with Whole Water Systems who has been installing these systems in Colorado for 15 years—a 1,300-square-foot ditch was lined with clay and a level of gravel and then planted with wetland plants to naturally neutralize all pollutants in the water. The result will be a lush wetland filled with grassy sedges, rushes and wild irises (but no water aboveground) that helps clean the environment naturally.

According to Brown, there are some financial incentives for solar like a federal tax credit, a state income tax deduction, and the ability to sell back renewable energy, but the greatest economic incentive he claims is home equity. "An attractive system should increase the value of your home more than the amount you invest in it. Then it's free energy."

"The benefit of LEED certification is that the home is a better product," continues Brown. "An independent third party tests and verifies that the home has been well built and in a responsible manner." OnPoint, a home inspection firm out of Boise and the LEED certification tester for Idaho, has watched over the construction project.

Brown applauds Harned and Ritzau for building a comfortable home that is also environmentally responsible. "They are leading the way. People know it's a good thing."

Harned and Ritzau love to share their new environmental ideas. "Whenever someone comes over, we talk about it. Maybe we can grow a little awareness."



Play Fair Ranch

While the Ritzau's were building their dream home, power real estate couple Cindy and Ken Ward have been living it.

Follow a flagstone walkway through a lovely orchard area where the original mature trees have been preserved and new ones added and you will find the Wards' LEED-conscious "Play Fair Ranch."

This contemporary farmhouse-style home south of Bellevue is comprised of three types of natural siding all purchased locally: white Smart Panel, Idaho granite, and fir, creating a patchwork effect

inspired by Cindy's love of quilting.

The shorter the distance building materials have to travel—limiting the amount of gas burned to build something—the more points earned with the certification squad.

The outside timbers of the home are from reclaimed sources, like recycled barn wood, which also was purchased locally at IGL in Carey.

The choice of siding was deliberate. The Smart Panel, for example, is denser than most wood and made from partially

recycled material. "You don't have to paint it as much. It serves not only as a great exterior but has a much higher insulating factor," Cindy explains. "The paneling is just more durable. That's a big thing with LEED—the durability of a product, how long it will last. You might spend more in the beginning but there's a payoff over time because of the durability."

In that vein, "there's a little saying that to build green costs green," she continues, "but there's a curve that once you've spent the bulk of your dollars in the beginning,

you get these better products. Then there's the payback period and every product's payback is going to be a little different."

Play Fair's roof is one of three in Blaine County to be made of 100 per cent recyclable materials, although you'd never know because it creates the look of an Old English cottage slate roof. "It's has a 50-year warranty. The durability is incredible," says Cindy, who is even more enthusiastic to share the story of her deep brown wood interior flooring.

Looking for reclaimed materials to craft the floor, Cindy found a company on the Internet—Trestlewood in Blackfoot, Idaho—that had recently won a contract in Salt Lake to dismantle old railway trestles.

The wood they chose was an exotic type called greenheart from British Guiana.

"Back in the 1930s, when Union Pacific Railroad was lining and building their refrigerator boxcars, they wanted to find the hardest wood possible—harder than teak."

Greenheart fit the bill, and now, "this is my railroad floor," she proudly declares.

The railroad floor is decorated in the front hall with a compass rose painted by local Hailey artist Keith Joe Dick. The compass rose is important not only because the Wards love to sail, but because they so painstakingly designed the house to be true solar south to capture the energy of the sun. It will always be there to remind them, pointing the way toward the sun and to the living room with its expansive southern-facing French doors opening onto a lovely view of a pond, pasture and a carved wood grain decking, which actually was made from partially recycled plastic and wood fibers.

In the living room, the couple installed striking black granite flooring that is not only beautiful but also durable and absorbs the sun's energy.

"The living room fireplace is the most efficient woodburning fireplace that you can buy in the U.S. right now," Cindy

notes. The style, called the Fireplace Extraordinaire, has a woodstove insert that gives the effect of a fireplace, and was purchased locally at The Warming Trend. It can heat up to 3,000 square feet and is framed by honed Jerusalem gold granite crafted by local Russ Jenson of Sun Valley Rug and Tile.

In the downstairs powder room, a handmade pressed copper sink is set into a huge piece of granite glittering with mica. The wallpaper here has another interesting story. It is handmade by women from a small village in Nepal and is their sole source of income. Every bathroom in the home has low water efficiency toilets with a dual flush so you can choose how much water you want to use.

The unique handrails that grace the stairway toward the second floor are woven brass and tubular steel that are very durable and thus gain the Wards more LEED points. The woven handrails, fashioned by Hailey artist Bob Wieder-



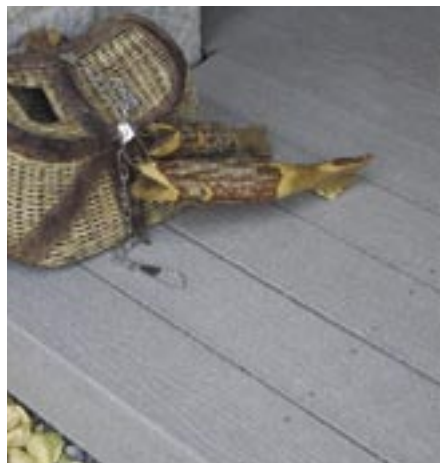
ABOVE Site plan courtesy of Tobin Architects
AIA
range of performers like those above as part
of the Summer Concert Series. LEFT BeauSoleil
took the stage last year at River Run, t



rick, were inspired by Cindy's memories of summers past when her family used to pick fruit using woven baskets.

Upstairs, a free-floating bridge is a signature element of their architect Tobin T. Dougherty of Tobin Architects of Ketchum. Dougherty is a modern stylist, who was able to implement many of the green elements into his passive solar design including the solar panels that will supplement the home's hot water and heat.

Continuing into their son Daniel's room, Cindy explains that the whole family was involved in the creative process of the house. Daniel designed much of his own room, including the original design of the bathroom with its deep red walls embossed with one thin line of river rocks. "We call it the 'River Runs Through It' room," says mom with a laugh. Daniel and his father Ken mixed and applied most of the paint in the home, which is all low VOC to avoid toxins. It was difficult for them to find low VOC products in the



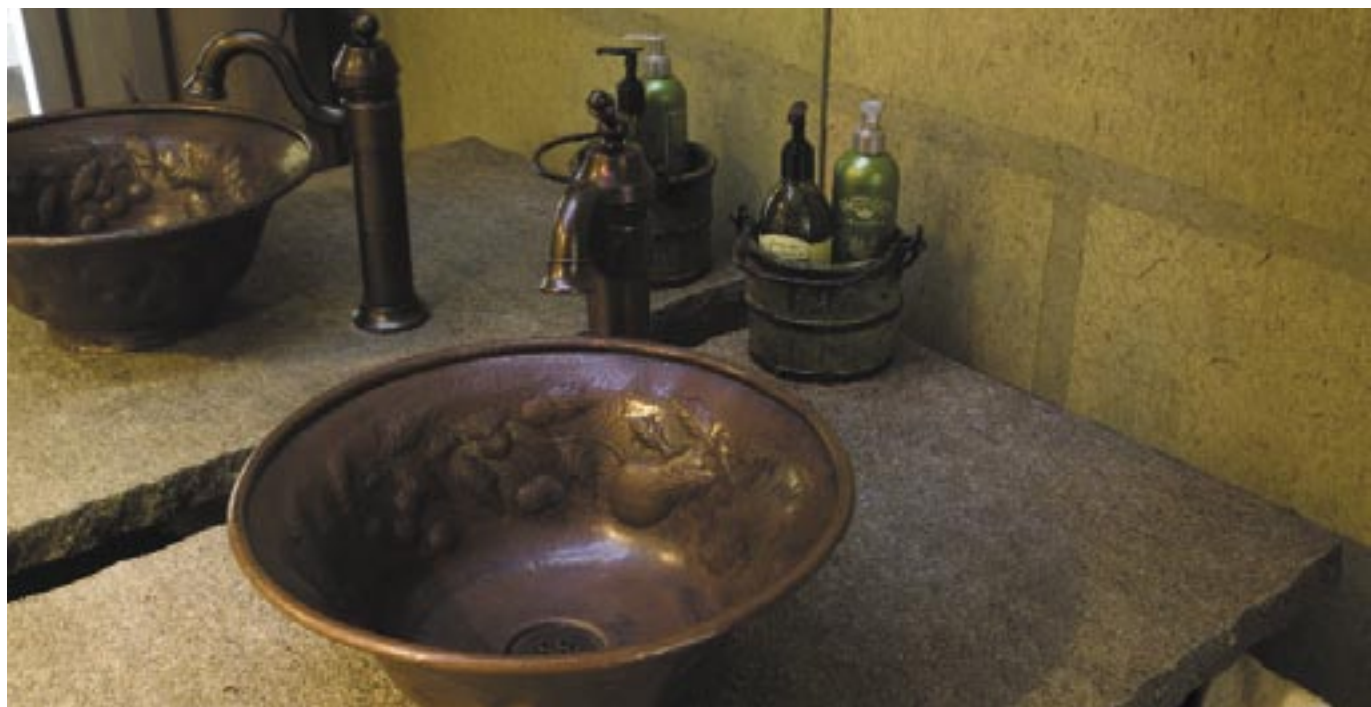
area, a thing the Wards hope will change.

Like Harned and Ritzau, the Wards consulted with Morgan Brown to create their environmentally-positive home. Brown found a LEED tester to test all the elements of the house. For example, every LEED house needs to be very tightly built so that there are no energy leaks. To this end, a foam spray insulation fills every crack and then the LEED tester checks for leaks.

The family also has a high-tech radon system as well as a fresh air-filtration system that cleans the air, coupled with a humidifier to add moisture.

Health issues were a big influence on the Wards decision to go green. One of their four children struggles with asthma. They have often wondered if this could be from crawling around on potentially toxic carpet or being exposed to radon as a baby and whether those seemingly innocuous home décor decisions have contributed to people's allergies in general.

AT LEFT: Sensors on the roof help control snow melt to harness the insulation factor without promoting dangerous accumulation. Sinks made of copper and heirloom items keep decor in theme with reuse and recycling throughout the ranch.



ABOVE: Though landlocked in Idaho, the Wards love the water. A compass in the floor not only represents their passion, but also to remind them of their efforts to see the home situated on true south for the maximum use of the sun.



So, having the chance to do it over again, they used little carpeting, along with the low VOC paint, and glue. All the floors are treated with a special water-based substance instead of varnish or chemicals.

"All of our lights are Energy Star super-high-efficient, compact fluorescent lights," says Cindy, who successfully embraced the LEED ideal of shopping locally. "Over half of our light fixtures are recycled or reclaimed," she adds, mentioning the gilded metal antique chandelier that hangs over the front hall stairs—a French chandelier from the turn of the century that was purchased locally at Bungalow in Hailey.

Ward loves her quiet Energy Star Asko dishwasher, and her Whirlpool Energy Star washer and dryer. "You use far less

water and detergent and you can dry a load in much less time," she boasts. There is a sensing mechanism that shuts off when the clothes are dry so you don't lose energy tumbling dry clothes. The laundry room is also lit by a recycled light fixture—a very special one. "My mom taught kindergarten for 40 years," Cindy says and the antique brass light fixture came from one of her old classrooms.

When not dealing real estate, Ken Ward is also known for his work as a volunteer football, soccer and baseball coach, which inspired the name "Play Fair Ranch." The name encompasses the family's philosophy to play fair in life and with the environment and is reflected in Ken's attitude toward his beautiful 4,350-square-foot home.

"It should be mandatory for everyone who builds a house over a million dollars

to be green," he says. "Why should I get to use five families' worth of natural resources just because I can. That's not fair."

There is a LEED price on having such a large home—a loss of points. LEED recommends more compactly built homes to conserve energy. However, there may be a new category for larger luxury homes soon and the Wards' home may be the first LEED-rated luxury home in Idaho.

Ken believes it will be a while before he gets a financial return on investing on some of the elements of a green home. "But there are the health issues, too," interjects Cindy. "How do you put a value on that? It's about the day I move into this house and I know I'm breathing good air." Ken agrees. "You want to reuse stuff, not just chew up everything. It's really something you do because you want to do it."



Rocky Mountain Hardware

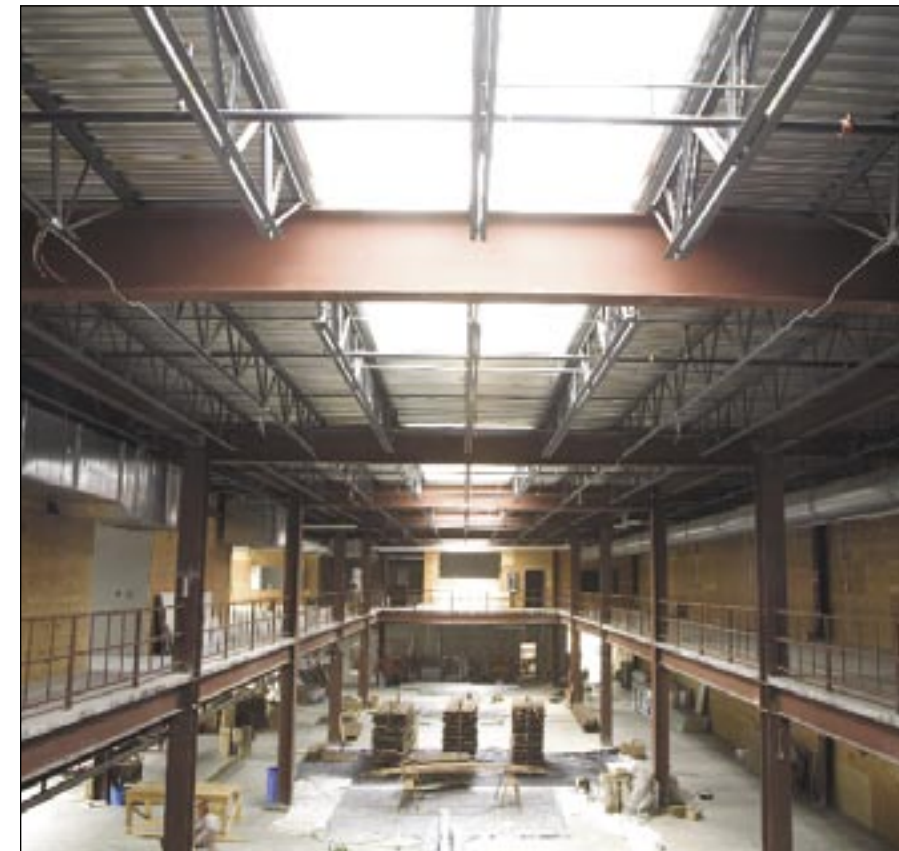
The Nickums were about to start designing a new, larger manufacturing facility for their growing Hailey business when they decided to attend GreenBuild, a trade show for the green building industry where they discovered a lot of inspiring new ideas. It was here that they decided to implement the LEED certification process for their new facility.

They have always used recycled materials to create their handmade bronze door, cabinet and bath hardware and wanted to continue the tradition in their own building process.

The first thing you notice about the new building looming large across from the Hailey Post Office is the striking native rock and rusted steel exterior. “The rock is from Oakley, Idaho. Using building materials from within a 500-mile radius of your project contributes toward a LEED point,” Nickum explains. “The idea behind this point is to burn less fuel in transport. The siding is recycled steel that we actually finished all ourselves at our Shoshone plant. We’ve been able to achieve LEED’s highest point level for our use of recycled content materials in the building.”

Another arresting feature of the 64,000-square-foot building are the five 28-foot by eight-foot skylights that provide 75 percent of the total light in the manufacturing space, Nickum says. “The building has been designed to maximize natural interior day lighting. In addition to a considerable electrical consumption savings, studies have shown that natural daylight can dramatically affect mental alertness, productivity, and psychological well being of a building’s occupants,” she says.

There are also massive windows looking out over Hailey and the mountains for the



LEFT sketch courtesy of Ruscitto Latham Blanton Architects.

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LEED points, and are able to achieve the fifth through an innovation point.

The LEED process has encouraged something else in the Valley—the environmental management of construction waste.

On the building site here at Rocky Mountain Hardware, builder Preston Ziegler of Sawtooth Construction comments that up until now most of the construction waste in town has “just been put in a dumpster and sent off to Ohio Gulch or taken down to Carey.” Now, to fulfill LEED guidelines, Ziegler has started separating the tremendous amount of steel scraps and wood into different bins. “About 70 to 80 percent of the waste will be recycled, diverting it away from the landfill, which to me is pretty impressive considering that usually it is all just thrown away.”

“This is it in Blaine County. It’s new. It’s up-to-date,” says Ziegler of the conservation effort. Inspired by this new way of building and surprised by how easy it has been to incorporate into the building process with such tremendous environmental return means, “I will probably implement it on all my construction sites now.

“It is innovative, but it is also the way of the future,” he continues. “Governments are going to start requiring it—using LEED as a guideline in the building process. Sun Valley has adopted the U.S. Mayors Climate Protection Agreement. Ketchum is talking about it—for city and government facilities. Most government facilities are requiring it. Most schools now have to follow LEED guidelines. But as far as non-governmental buildings, it’s still a choice.” Other than the waste management, Ziegler has been most impressed by the energy efficiency and indoor air quality of the new building.

“We’re changing our construction techniques,” says Ziegler “Using different adhesives for the duct work, for gluing wood together. It’s all low VOC. Usually we just

employees in the office. Rocky Mountain Hardware employs 150 people and wants the business to be a healthy environment for all. The electric lighting is energy efficient, too. When an employee enters or leaves a room, an occupancy sensor will turn the lights on or off automatically. In addition to the windows, skylights and occupancy sensors, the use of light-colored paints and polished concrete floors will create light reflectance and thus less energy consumption.

Besides improved lighting, the air inside the building will be cleaner. “We’ve upgraded the HVAC—heating, ventilation and air-conditioning system. This state-of-the-art and energy-efficient system is designed to perform according to the needs of individual workspaces,” says Nickum. In addition to the HVAC system, operable windows have been integrated to increase the ventilation and air quality within each workspace.

Rocky Mountain Hardware has also used low VOC paint, carpet, adhesives and plywood to prevent off-gassing to help maintain the indoor air quality.

One of the most exciting innovations here is the new water system. Rocky Mountain Hardware uses about 3,000 gal-

lons of potable water a day to vibrate, clean, polish and create the different patinas of bronze for their hardware. This water would typically be sent out as waste.

To make the process more environmentally-efficient, the Nickums, working with architect Nick Latham, have created a system that gathers storm water from the roof, filters and recycles it into two, 10,000-gallon underground tanks. Through this water system, Latham estimates that it will collect approximately 250,000 gallons a year based on previous rain/snowfall records. The stored water will be used in the production process and then sent back through the filtration and recycling system to be used over again and again before being sent out as waste. This water will also be used for irrigating the drought-tolerant landscape.

The entire system will save the city of Hailey approximately 500,000 gallons of potable water annually, not to mention the time and energy savings at the sewage treatment plant. In addition to this water system, Rocky Mountain Hardware has elected to use low consumption fixtures and faucets throughout the facility. With these efforts, they are achieving four of the five available

buy a tube of construction adhesive and it's pretty toxic. It [low VOC glue] is a little more expensive, but not much."

The air quality is also improved by using formaldehyde-free insulation in combination with radiant foil in the building so that there is no off-gassing for the people working there. The use of natural wool bats instead of fiberglass is much healthier. In fact, says Nickum, "The building will be formaldehyde free. Usually, they're not. All of the cabinetry and office furniture will be made with Roseburg formaldehyde-free material, and low VOC right down to the laminate countertops to prevent off-gassing."

Rocky Mountain Hardware has achieved the alternative transportation LEED points through providing designated parking spaces for low-emitting, fuel-efficient vehicles, bike racks, showers and locker rooms. They have also achieved the "heat island effect" point by constructing an underground parking garage instead of a large above-ground parking lot.

In addition to constructing a LEED-certified building, the hardware business has shown its commitment to the environment through the use of alternative transportation. They have purchased two bicycles and a Ford Escape hybrid for employee and client use, and a 15-passenger van used to shuttle employees daily between their Hailey and Shoshone manufacturing facilities, saving 14 round trips a day.

Rocky Mountain Hardware is on target for a gold certification.

Environmental correctness and the cost-saving energy efficiency of building green are finally getting the attention of developers nationwide, hoping to help boost real estate sales along the way.

Here, Roth Development Group, LLC and Locally Global Investments, LLC, are trying their hands at LEED certification for the Sweetwater community planned for south of Hailey.

Sweetwater is inspired by the neighbor-

hood development and new construction certification programs of LEED that stress the building of compact, connected and pedestrian-friendly communities.

Sweetwater designers are working toward LEED ND certification for their entire site and LEED NC for the central Grange building. To this end, the community will be compactly built—421 units on 22 acres—encouraging community connections and reducing sprawl to preserve surrounding farmland and sensitive wildlife habitat and to minimize resources for infrastructure such as utilities and roads.

To meet LEED's goals, Sweetwater provides a diversity of housing types that will attract a diversity of people, condominiums, carriage houses and live/work townhouses, where owners will be able to have businesses or shops on the bottom floor of their living unit, encouraging walking distance to businesses within the community. "We're hoping that someone will open a coffee shop in the mercantile/mixed-use building," says Mindy Black, project manager with architects Weber + Thompson, PLLC.

Black says that the project builds on current theories in community planning that de-emphasize cars in favor of pedestrians, encouraging neighborhood interaction. To that end, the attached homes here feature welcoming porches of different styles and colors in front while garages are kept in the rear, off-street, and partially buried underground. Sidewalk pathways will connect all the homes to a 1.6-acre central park area that will encourage community gatherings with its benches, barbecue pit, patio, kids play structure, orchard and even the possibility for a community garden.

Walking through the construction site, Black comments, "The construction business is one of the most wasteful industries we have." The Sweetwater project aims to reduce this waste by bringing in wall sections and roof trusses that have been pre-measured and pre-built in a Boise factory, rather than cutting the lumber on-site creating a lot of waste material.

"Putting nature back on the site once it's developed is really important. It's incredible

to note that we're planning over 1,000 trees on this site," she continues. Some areas will have small pocket parks where kids can play while neighborhood parents can share childcare duties.

Sweetwater is walking distance from the high school and has built two sheltered bus stops on the property to encourage the use of mass transit rather than cars. There will be a central post office on the property to reduce traffic into town and create another gathering place for the neighborhood. Hybrid and carpooling vehicles are given preferred parking and there is a special place for bicycles complete with changing room. All these environmental strategies earn LEED points.

An interesting environmental aspect of the project and the Wood River Valley is the storm water system. All storm water runoff within the Valley is handled within development sites where as in most other places municipalities pipe and treat storm water. The Valley provides excellent infiltration so there is no need for piping and treating storm water runoff.

Instead of being piped into storm water lines, rainwater is routed to infiltration wells and soaks into the groundwater to recharge the aquifer rather than being runoff into local waterways. This reduces the amount of stress on the utility infrastructure as well as protecting natural wildlife habitat. Runoff is also reduced by laying brick pavers instead of cement on the Sweetwater sidewalks, allowing water to infiltrate more naturally into the earth between the bricks.

All in all, the LEED certification process seems to be accomplishing its goals—encouraging and guiding environmentally-concerned citizens to take steps towards protecting the environment and the community. One person at a time, these locals are inspiring others to work toward a cleaner environment, too. **SMV**

Crystal Lee Thurston is a longtime local freelance writer who likes to read, write, and hike the uncluttered hills and mountains of the Wood River Valley and appreciates anyone who works to save the beauty of nature surrounding us here. She just bought a Prius.