

May 2012 News and Events

Residents settle into their Green Idea House

Bartsch, Dawnya. [The Beach Reporter](#), 18 Apr 2012. 21 Apr 2012
(http://www.tbrnews.com/articles/2012/04/24/hermosa_beach_news/news02.txt > .).

It's been just about three weeks since Monica and Robert Fortunato moved into their "new" green home, and what do they like about it best? Monica likes never having to turn a light on during the day, and Robert likes that their electricity bill is about \$1.90 a month.



The Hermosa Beach couple and their son have been living in a rental for a little more than a year while they took their original 1959 home, a "post and beam, California contemporary," and transformed it into a net zero or no overall energy consumption and award-winning green house. The couple recently found out that their project won the 2012 Green Leadership Award for a residential project in Los Angeles County.

Along with its net zero status, which in a nutshell means the home produces as much energy as it consumes, the Fortunatos tried to reuse as many materials from their 1959 home or other recycled products as possible. For example, the living room ceiling was made with 80-year-old redwood saved from a Los Angeles structure. And rather than demolishing their old house completely and rebuilding from the ground up, the couple elected to keep as much of the yard, foundation and existing structure as they could.

The Fortunatos' home-building journey began several years ago, when the California Public Utilities Commission released guidelines to have all new residential housing be built with net zero energy standards by 2020 and all commercial structures by 2030. Although they have long considered themselves environmentalists, it was the new building guidelines that gave the Fortunatos the impetus to take green living to the next level.

"We really wanted to prove that a truly green home can be built, and that it is accessible to everyone," said Robert, who is a leadership and business strategy consultant.

Accomplishing this goal took some time. The planning and research process to create such a home took longer than they anticipated, said Monica, who works as an occupational therapist. But the actual building time for their 2,100-square-foot Prospect Avenue home was a little more than a year.

"Many of the people we worked with would say, 'This is not the way we usually do things,'" Robert said. "And we would say, 'That's exactly the point.'"

Some of the cutting-edge energy-efficient aspects in their home include passive solar heating, a thermal chimney, advanced insulation, radiant floor heating, solar panels, wind turbines, special hot water heaters, LED lighting, television and computer screens, along with efficient appliances and cooking technologies all of which reduce power consumption.

May 2012 News and Events

They also have a special water catch system and drought-tolerant landscaping that will capture rainwater, keep it from leaving their property and channel it into their landscape. In addition, the house is reconstructed in such a way as to retrieve as much sunlight as possible during the winter and has well-positioned overhangs to stave off sun exposure during the summer months.

It's the purposefully-placed skylights and windows, including in closets, that have allowed them to not turn on any lights during the day. And from what they can tell in their short three weeks back in their home, it's working just as it's supposed to. Not only is the house not using any outside energy, but it appears to be producing some. Their inconsequential electricity bill is not for power usage, but some type of processing fee, they think.

Despite the home's many innovations, the Fortunatos claim that much of what they did and used is available for everyone and not expensive. Their goal is to get the word out.

"We are very eager to share what we have learned," Monica said. "That's the point."

The Fortunatos designed the home themselves and later used consultants to help with some aspects of green building and make sure the plans were drawn correctly and city-acceptable. The project cost approximately \$400,000, and Robert served as the project's general contractor. They paid for their home renovation themselves, although they are taking advantage of some \$8,000 in rebate programs administered through various county programs, they said.

Their home is now being billed as the Green Idea House and it is serving as a case study for Southern California Edison's net-zero energy initiative. The Fortunatos consider their home a sort of green laboratory and in many ways a work in progress as they monitor its energy efficiency and tinker with it, they said.

Along with being the darling of many at City Hall, who are vying to make the Hermosa Beach community a leader in the environmental movement, the Fortunatos' project has been capturing the attention of those outside the Beach Cities with its recent leadership award and GreenPoint rating, the first home in Los Angeles County to garner this rating.

Click here to go to the [Green Idea House website](#) for more information and more pictures!