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Cover Story /

Builders showcase great American homes

One of the great things about living in America is that unless you specifically choose a planned development or community that has restrictions or strict guidelines, you can pretty much build your log cabin, Victorian home, farm-style home or urban loft-like home right next door to a house whose exterior architecture is nothing like yours.

Aesthetically, that can be a good or bad thing. A positive result depends on many factors. But we applaud the freedom to buy and live in a house that reflects our personal tastes.

That opportunity was evident at the adjacent sites of this year's two official showcase homes which were part of the 2007 International Builders' Show in Orlando in February. This was the first year in the show's history for two showcase houses, and the first time that a remodeled home was included. The houses serve as laboratories for building industry professionals who come from around the world to learn about the latest in energy efficiency, architectural design, construction techniques and life-style trends.

The New American Home and The Renewed American Home are located in the Lake Eola Heights Historic District near downtown Orlando. Both illustrate how revitalization of an older neighborhood is possible. Also, both houses share the latest in universal design, are certified green homes and feature extensive integration of several low-voltage systems for whole house lighting control, entertainment and security.

The concepts and materials found in the homes can be adapted for any home in any price range in any part of America. But the two houses will never be mistaken for one another. And that's one of the reasons they are so fascinating.

The New American Home

The New American Home 2007 is a three-story, urban loft style house that generates strong responses, right from



The New American Home, near downtown Orlando, is a three-story, urban loft style house.

James F. Wilson

the entry terrace with its fire shelf and fountain. The home's precast concrete walls, stacked, rectangular layout, terraces and rooftop plaza complete with grass, shrubs and other plants, give it a contemporary, cosmopolitan look.

The home has 5,800 square foot of living space with an added 576-square-foot suite (great for in-laws, grown children or guests) above a detached two-car garage. Inside the garage is an opening in the floor to a cistern that collects rain water to be pumped to the roof and terraces for irrigation. A "butterfly court with flowers, fountains and fireflies" and a pretty lap pool connect the main residence with the garage building and provide a fun view from the upper levels.

An office, home theater, mud/laundry room, wet bar and bedroom that opens to the pool are located on the first floor. A short staircase accessible from the first floor (that seems to be designed by Escher, the popular graphic artist with a sense of humor) leads down to a wine rack. Right, not a wine cellar, but a wall wine rack. Many visitors questioned the feature, saying they felt like they had been "tricked" and led to a dead end. But others liked the minimalist look.

A shallow basement holds the home's behind-the-scenes equipment.

Things are equally intriguing on the second floor, which includes a blue glass floor in the hallway. One wall of the large outside shower stall holds a large, frosted glass window that can be opened. Obviously, the home is in sunny Florida, not Ohio where an outside shower may appeal to us only about two days a year

if we are lucky. Still, modesty aside, it was a neat feature. The master suite encompasses most of the second floor.

Going up — third floor. Some visitors are so fascinated by the house that they don't notice they haven't seen the kitchen until they get to the third floor. Kitchen location was a major concern for some visitors, but an elevator helps with groceries. The living room/dining room are basically one and the same and open to the third floor terrace with artificial turf — the "back yard" of the home.

The roof is home to solar photovoltaic panels and a living green roof system that includes drought-tolerant plants. The house uses 73 percent less energy for heating and cooling and 54 percent less energy for water heating than a typical home.

The house was designed by Bloodgood Sharp Buster Architects and Planners of Des Moines, Iowa, and built by Homes by Carmen Dominguez of Orlando.

The Renewed American Home

The Renewed American Home could be dropped anywhere in the United States and could be, well, right at home. Built in 1909, the house reflects Florida's diverse history with its marvelous mix of Victorian, Four-Square Gable and Colonial Revival architectural and design elements. Originally consisting of 2,462 square feet, the house was moved from the lot that is now the site of the New American Home. The renovated home received a basement and other living areas to total 5,860 square feet of air-conditioned space (7,175 square feet in total).

The large, brick turnaround driveway also serves as a courtyard which connects to a stunning covered patio next to the garage. A television over the outdoor fireplace adds to the outdoor room's appeal. A corner staircase in the room leads to the exceptional garage apartment.

The two-story main house includes two master bedrooms and three additional bedrooms, five and a half baths, a library, a full morning kitchen (coffee bar) in the upstairs hallway and a kitchen, dining room and living room that flow seamlessly from one to another.

The basement is a knockout with a good layout, no wasted space and no architectural corner cutting. It includes a laundry/craft/wrapping room the size of a small house, flex space and a safe room (think concrete walls and ceiling and steel door). The true, temperature-controlled wine cellar has room for 1,600 bottles and has a red paver floor. A fire sprinkler system is installed throughout the house.

The Renewed American House is for sale at \$3,150,000. Optional purchases include the 900 bottles in the wine cellar (\$14,200), the exercise equipment in the workout room (\$16,500) and the Robb & Stucky Furniture and Accessory Package (\$262,218). The renovation was designed by Lucia, Kassik & Monday, Inc. and the house was remodeled by PSG Construction, both of Winter Park, Fla.

On the cover: Family room of The Renewed American Home near downtown Orlando, remodeled by PSG Construction, Inc. Photo by James F. Wilson.

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