Showcase cottage combines cozy styling with modern, sustainable practices

By Derick Belden of Southern Living

The Cliffs Cottage

The Cliffs Cottage, Southern Living’s showcase home on the campus of Furman University in Greenville, S.C., is a project that began more than seven years ago. But it wasn’t until 2006, when Furman shared its long-term commitment to the environment and sustainability, that we recognized a tremendous opportunity to learn firsthand about building better houses. For the next year, we’re going to use this home to look at “green” topics and give you real-life advice.

- Southern Living.com: [Kitchen makeovers](http://southernliving.com/kitchen)
- Video: [Green housekeeping that’s easy on your wallet](http://southernliving.com/videos)

Enter the Monthly Room Makeover on MyHomeIdeas.com. © 2009 SPC Digital. All rights reserved.
Showcase cottage combines cozy styling with modern, sustainable practices

Getting started

The home’s design was important to the overall mission. We had to be sensitive to how this affected material needs, the home’s position on the lot and how the house fit onto the Furman University campus. And, for our readers, we wanted to ensure that the home was comfortable and traditionally styled with contemporary details, and that every product was readily available.

Furman recruited architect Scott Johnston of Johnston Design Group and landscape architect Mark Byington of Innocenti and Webel to meet these goals. Johnston’s practice in Greenville is centered on green design. Innocenti and Webel created the master plan for the “new” Furman campus 50 years ago, and the firm continues to provide landscape planning for the university. Both team members understood how to tie this new project in to the existing campus.

- Facebook users: Become a fan of MSN Real Estate

© Laurey W. Glenn

© 2009 SPC Digital. All rights reserved.
Showcase cottage combines cozy styling with modern, sustainable practices

House inspiration

Architect Scott Johnston was inspired by stone bridges on the campus and some of the Craftsman details on nearby student cottages. He was charged with designing a home that will eventually be transformed into Furman University’s Center for Sustainability. Landscape architect Mark Byington’s challenge was to incorporate a more casual house into the formal garden spaces on campus. He used a natural slope to step the house down into a garden filled with native plants.

With plans taking shape, Linda McDougald and Adrienne Fulmer of Postcard from Paris began pulling together the interiors. With green as the focus, evaluating which products were applicable made the interiors as challenging as getting the architecture correct. But, again, learning was part of the process. Furman enlisted Triangle Construction, with William Trammell and Fred Lusk leading the charge, to meet the approaching deadline. The Cliffs Cottage is intended to be the ultimate in green design. We tried to use every product that filled the bill. Our goal is to give you tools to make your home greener and more sustainable. It all starts with education.

© Laurey W. Glenn

Enter the Monthly Room Makeover on MyHomeIdeas.com.
© 2009 SPC Digital. All rights reserved.
Showcase cottage combines cozy styling with modern, sustainable practices

Efficient energy use

The Cliffs Cottage looks at energy use in three ways.

1. **Managing power use more efficiently.** Through a partnership with Charlotte, N.C.-based Duke Energy, the house uses GridPoint technology to monitor energy. It’s essentially a brain tied into the electric panel. The consumer and the power company can monitor circuits in the house to determine the most efficient use of power. For example, did you know that most electronics still draw power when they’re off? With GridPoint, you can tell the computer to turn off those circuits when you’re not at home.

You can: Plug your electronics into a power strip. Switch it off when you leave home.

- **Facebook users:** Become a fan of MSN Real Estate

---

© Laurey W. Glenn

© 2009 SPC Digital. All rights reserved.
Showcase cottage combines cozy styling with modern, sustainable practices

2. Generating power

The site also integrates around 35 kilowatts of solar power. Panels on the south face of the garage generate 4 to 5 kW, typical of a suburban home. Panels on garden structures and sculpture augment the rooftop array and offer ideas for other ways that solar collectors can be added to an existing home. The power generated feeds into the GridPoint system, charging a battery for use during power outages. Because Duke Energy uses net metering, any excess power is sold back to the power company.

Solar energy is becoming more realistic every day. Tankless water-heating systems are gaining popularity, but The Cliffs Cottage has an alternative solution. With two small solar panels on the roof above the kitchen, the sun heats water before it hits the tank in the basement. That way, you’re not using electricity to heat cool water; you only expend energy to heat water that falls below your preset temperature. This could mean free hot water most of the year.

You can: Use the Solar Estimator at findsolar.com to determine the potential savings in your home.
Showcase cottage combines cozy styling with modern, sustainable practices

3. Building a home that requires less energy

This should be a no-brainer, but you’d be surprised at the homes built today using less responsible products.

The Cliffs Cottage incorporates double-insulated windows and doors, Icynene insulation and spider fiberglass insulation made from recycled material to create a draft-free home. By sealing the ductwork properly and balancing the system, Furman University is not wasting energy to condition air in the basement or attic. The interiors team selected appliances for their efficiency. For aesthetics, solid shades on decorative lighting hide compact fluorescent bulbs.

You can: Have your ductwork inspected and sealed if necessary. Balance your heating-and-cooling system. At up to a 40% energy savings by fixing an inefficient and leaking system, you’ll easily offset the expense of the work.

Facebook users: Become a fan of MSN Real Estate

Find tips to save energy around the house
Showcase cottage combines cozy styling with modern, sustainable practices

Material decisions

Part of the process of designing and building a green home is researching locally available materials and selecting those that reduce waste and help you build a better house.

Local is easy. In the case of The Cliffs Cottage, the stone on the exterior was quarried from the nearby mountains. Cabinets came from neighboring Tennessee. They were shipped flat to save on transportation costs and were assembled on-site. By buying local, you can help reduce emissions and support your local economy.

The framing of this house is a combination of products from iLevel by Weyerhaeuser. Unlike conventional lumber, iLevel reduces waste by using more of the tree, keeping the builder from having to discard or pick through bad lumber. When the experts at iLevel estimated our plans, they came up with about 9% in material savings compared with using conventional lumber. The benefit: a better-built house and, with an anti-mold and mildew coating on the lumber, a healthier home.

You can: Research, research, research. Put as much care into selecting the materials you can’t see, such as lumber and insulation, as you do into those you can see, such as stone and cabinetry.
Showcase cottage combines cozy styling with modern, sustainable practices

Decorative decisions

Interior designers Linda McDougald and Adrienne Fulmer also wanted to link the house back to the Furman University campus. They took inspiration from an adjacent Japanese garden and mixed traditional furnishings with contemporary details. The furniture comes from a number of sources. Some pieces are antique or vintage — the original recycled product — and others are made from reclaimed wood, but most is from nearby North Carolina furniture companies committed to manufacturing in environmentally sensitive ways.

For flooring, they chose fast-growing yet durable bamboo and then selected a dark stain to keep the house from looking too contemporary. Selecting a prefinished floor helps keep smelly stains and sealers from being used inside. McDougald and Fulmer used natural tile and tile with recycled content, and they chose locally formed concrete countertops for the kitchen.

You can: Look for furniture made with FSC- or SFI-certified lumber, soy-based cushions, organic fabrics and recycled content.

Facebook users: Become a fan of MSN Real Estate

© Laurey W. Glenn

Southern Living
Showcase cottage combines cozy styling with modern, sustainable practices

Meet the team and partners who made The Cliffs Cottage Southern Living’s most innovative house ever.

-- Styling by Scott Martin

- Southern Living.com: Kitchen makeovers
- Video: Green housekeeping that’s easy on your wallet

Decorate home with reclaimed wood furniture

© Laurey W. Glenn

Enter the Monthly Room Makeover on MyHomeIdeas.com.
© 2009 SPC Digital. All rights reserved.