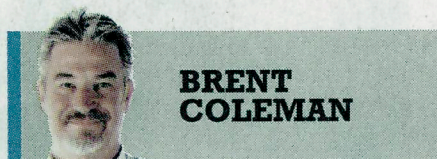


COVER STORY

Cool homes: Green living in Columbia Tusculum



BRENT COLEMAN

I report on ways to improve how you live. Reach me at bcoleman@enquirer.com.

The 1890 Victorian Chris and Kim Nietch bought in the Columbia Tusculum Historic District seven years ago was somewhat of a standout – not because it was one of the “painted ladies” the area is known for, but because it wasn’t.

Fast forward to November and the formerly lackluster house with the shabby shingle roof is still a standout – not because it has become one of those ladies, but because it is green – in color and energy efficiency.

Credit at-home yoga instructor Kim for most of the home’s striking exterior look and classy interior touches.

Credit for the old home’s green energy features – especially what might be the most sophisticated residential water harvesting system in the city – goes to Chris, who has a Ph.D. in ecology and works as a water quality researcher for the Environmental Protection Agency.

“I knew if we could get the structure and put it together right, Kim could really have a go at turning this place into something cool,” Chris said.

Among Kim’s clever interior touches:

- » A pairing of vintage art in the form of a 1930 Hammond Postal Telegraph Bichronus Electric Time wall clock she bought for \$5 at a yard sale in her hometown of Hillsboro, N.J., and an old electric Wiedemann beer sign found behind a wall Chris had to tear apart in the basement.

- » A mobile made from a twisted sycamore tree branch Kim brought home from nearby Alms Park from which she hung three glass baubles and a miniature birdhouse.

Among Chris’ green engineering projects:

- » A 3-kilowatt solar panel system that helped cut their summer energy bills by one-third, despite the addition of 1,000 square feet of living space that includes a lower-level studio where Kim runs her Ashtanga yoga business, Yogasana.

- » A solar-thermal-powered radiant floor heating system downstairs that, along with minisplit, zonal heat pump units, helps keep Yogasana Studios at a steady 75 degrees year-round.

“Our goal for the renovation was to be net zero. We hoped our energy bills would improve but definitely didn’t want them going up,” Chris said.



The Nietches agreed on the dark green fiber cement siding, but the red metal roof and trim in various shades of yellow were Kim’s doing. THE ENQUIRER/BRENT COLEMAN



Captured rainwater trickles down a rock-lined stream to a second pond in the backyard. THE ENQUIRER/JEFF SWINGER



The Nietches recovered two old doors that were original to the 1890 house and repurposed them when making this shallow wall cupboard. THE ENQUIRER/JEFF SWINGER

LOOK INSIDE AND HEAR THE STREAM
To view a photo gallery of the Nietches’ property and learn about their water harvesting stream system, go to Cincinnati.com. Search: cool homes



This view from the backyard shows the bump-out addition that was a major part of the Nietches’ remodeling job.

The top terrace pergola holds a solar panel set-up that Chris said he based on an award-winning one featured in Dwell magazine. It also provides a stellar view of the Northern Kentucky hills.

PHOTOS BY JEFF SWINGER/THE ENQUIRER

Q&A with Chris Nietch

What inspired you to take a green approach?

I’ve had a great respect for the natural world for nearly as long as I can remember. I study how humans interact with it for a living, and feel that a healthy environment is a critical and essential part of personal mind and body health. The interest in making this all translate to our personal lives was strong in a “practice what you preach” approach. ... We truly loved the location, the neighbors, the neighborhood. The fact that we were directly across from the famed painted ladies made us want to do a remodel that could rival their recognition in the future.

Describe the interior design style you’ve established. What’s your favorite example of it?

We were looking for that urban-house-on-a-mountain-side sort of feel. ... We reused original floor joists in the kitchen to trim-out main level. Reclaimed wood is hot right now for green interior design, but this goes beyond, due to it having been an integral component of the structure

itself. Reuse also comes into play with a pair of tall original doors from one part of the original house layout, now incorporated as a fabulous showcase built-in cabinet on the staircase landing. It looks like it was always there.

What room or place in your home is your favorite and why?

The kitchen area. We wanted the kitchen to be central yet accessible to all aspects of dining, music, TV viewing and living space. We can do office work from it, eat at it, tend bar from it, cook in it, entertain around it. And all features within it were hand-picked for the green and personal aesthetics. The layout, cabinetry, countertops, etc., were largely our own designs.

What was the biggest challenge and how did you meet it?

Being in the historic district and on a hillside overlay made the project difficult. It probably would have been easier and cheaper to have knocked the whole thing down (was not an option). ... We took time to figure out what would probably be the best approach to tackling some of the issues rather than totally taking the “we’ll deal with it when we get there” ap-

proach.

What advice would you give people interested in upgrading their home in a green fashion?

Try to understand as best as you can what makes a product, process or approach “green” over another that is not considered as such. You will spend more for green projects, period, but it will be helpful to understand what costs are recoverable over the long term and what won’t be. ... Watch-out for miscommunication among contractors and sub-contractors. We found our builder to be knowledgeable regarding green design and sustainable practices, but many of the subs were not. ... Local specialized stores and distributors will likely be in the know and up to date on green options, as well as contractors and installers. ■



Across from the yoga studio shower is an infrared sauna. The cabinet is custom; the sink from IKEA. PHOTOS BY JEFF SWINGER/THE ENQUIRER

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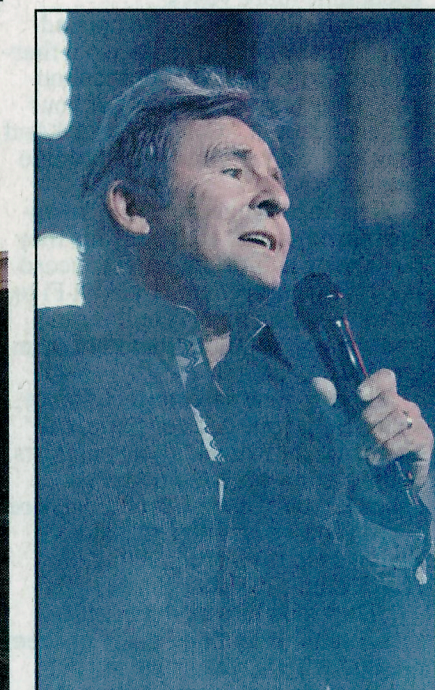
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