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The Greening of Shoreland Hills

by Barbara Stodola



Blending with the tall trees of Shoreland Hills, the house built by Larry Zimmer and Ted Perzanowski was designed to harmonize with nature.

On a tree-shaded dune in Shoreland Hills, Larry Zimmer and Ted Perzanowski have built an eco-friendly house that defers to the natural beauty of its site.

About forty oaks remain on the property, and a five-inch mulch of wood chips blankets the ground – mulch created from the fifteen trees removed to make way for the house. Chunks of asphalt street pavement, hauled away from a vacant lot in Michigan City, now form a rustic stairway, climbing up the dune – just one of the clever recycling techniques used in construction of the house.



Wood chips blanket the steep dune; the stairway consists of chunks of street pavement salvaged from a vacant lot in Michigan City.

“It’s been a passion of mine during my thirty-year career, to make a home as environmentally friendly as possible,” says Zimmer. “We used local products, local craftsmen, and recycled materials whenever possible. We sent the trees to a sawyer from Harbert, and a company from Stevensville (Lakeshore Stair) did the interior stair treads and floor boards.”

On the first floor are offices for Zimmer, an interior designer, and Perzanowski, whose counseling practice is subtitled “Talk To Ted.”

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Larry Zimmer, an interior designer, owns a Chicago-based firm, No Place Like Home.



Ted Perzanowski operates a counseling practice, Talk To Ted, from the new home in Shoreland Hills.

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The second-floor living space measures just 1,000 square feet. "We've lived together for twenty-three years," says Zimmer, "and this is all the space we need. Neither one of us collects or accumulates much. We want a place that is simple, clean and peaceful; neutral earth tones that blend with the outdoors. Up here, at the top of the dune, it's like living in a tree house."

The exterior pine siding came from a managed forest in northern Michigan. It is applied in two directions, Zimmer points out – vertically across the front, to emphasize the verticality of the trees; and horizontally along the side, to echo the horizontality of the land: "oaks meeting the dune," he muses. Treated with an ebonized stain, the home's siding blends in quietly with the bark of the trees.

Zimmer designed the house and an architect friend, Jim Jaksa, acted as consultant. "The house is not 'stick-built,'" Zimmer says. "It is platform-framed using SIPS (structural insulated panels), which consist of three layers – a foam panel sandwiched between two layers of particle board. The panels are made by Porter Corporation in Holland, Michigan, another local supplier. Our walls are eight inches thick, and the roof is twelve inches. The windows are triple-paned, for the highest energy efficiency that was affordable."

A consulting company from Valparaiso, Energy Diagnostics, has given the house a five-star rating – which means, Zimmer says, "It is 50% more energy-efficient than the standard code-built house." The cost of utilities has been estimated to run \$1,304. annually – to include heating, cooling, lighting. "We shall see," he says with a smile. "This will be our first winter here."



A construction photo shows the eight-inch-thick wall insulated with foam, sandwiched between two layers of particle board.



Square square square rectangle – the home's simple geometry contributes a ghostly presence to the leafless winter trees.

Zimmer and Perzanowski lived for six years in another house they built in Michigan City. Previously they renovated a 100-year-old Victorian house in Chicago. They broke ground in Shoreland Hills in October, 2008, and moved in mid-August, 2009.

Their decision-making was guided by life experiences. "We've taken trips to national parks out west and natural areas in Europe and New Zealand, and we feel it's our responsibility to preserve the beauty of nature," Zimmer said. "We tried to do things in the most economical way possible."

The ground floor, made of cement, was finished off so expertly that "We applied a clear acrylic finish, and it almost looks like stone." The spiral staircase, a space-saving design by Zimmer, was fabricated in Three Oaks, Michigan, by Eric and Wally Meissner. "It is a steel structure, open in the center to let the light come through," Zimmer said. "The entire staircase, with its steel frame and oak stair treads, was made in their shop. It took five guys to carry it into the house."

All the drywall was made in Indiana, of 90% recycled material. There is a three-zone heating/cooling system and an on-demand water heater. Solatube lighting makes use of natural sunlight, and other lights are on dimmers. Appliances are energy star-rated.

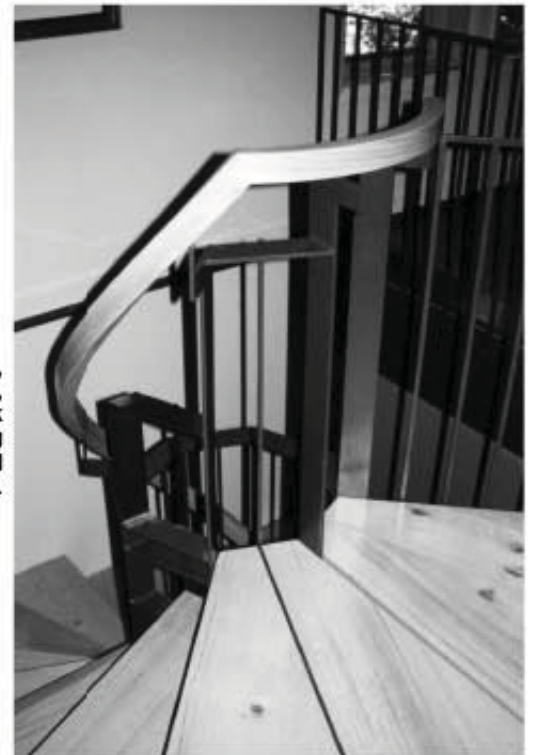
The kitchen consists of a fifteen-foot wall with sink, dishwasher, electric oven and gas cook-top set into the countertop. That's it; fifteen feet takes care of food preparation needs. A niche around the corner accommodates the refrigerator. Doug Barnes, a master cabinet-maker from Michigan City, used rift-sawn white oak for the custom cabinetry. The countertop, a high-density plastic material called Virtuestone, comes from Stevensville, Michigan – whereas most stone products, Zimmer points out, need to be imported.

The living area is a large open space with the kitchen wall opposite the fireplace, and a seating area that is comfortably but simply furnished. Square carpet tiles, set into the oak floors, maintain the minimal decor. The firebox, a prefab unit clad in ceramic tile, was made in Richmond, Indiana, of 50% recycled glass. Facing it are the sofa and two end tables, "the only things new," Zimmer says. Several chairs are antique Arts & Crafts pieces, a style he likes "because it has a contemporary look."

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The stair rail marks off the custom-designed kitchen from the open living space.



The spiral staircase, designed by Zimmer, was built of oak stair treads circling around an open steel framework.



The fireplace, made of recycled glass, is flanked by curtainless windows and a pair of antique Arts & Crafts chairs.

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A bedroom, a bathroom, a screened porch and a large walk-in closet complete the second-floor living area. Another space-saving device is the placement of washer and dryer in the most convenient spot – right there in the walk-in closet.

Windows are placed for cross-ventilation and to allow the greatest possible exposure to the outdoors. The house is so designed that very few doors are needed, thus providing an unbroken view and a continuous flow, without the disruption of opening and closing doors.

To keep attention focused on the woodland view, neutral colors are used throughout the house. Water-based paints from Sherwin-Williams are appropriately named “vertical taupe” and “kilim beige”.



The interior décor is personalized by small paintings, the work of local artists David Langley and Julie Kasniunas, Paul Jeselskis’ pottery, and a few pieces by old friends. Otherwise, Zimmer points out, “Nature is our art work.”

Zimmer’s design was achieved after years of contemplating how to build efficiently, economically, and in harmony with nature. He commended the work of Flemington Construction, local carpenter Kirk Sizer, and other craftsmen involved in the custom-built project, and reflected on “how gratifying it was, to work with people who love what they do.”

Open doorways contribute to the home’s spacious feeling, allowing outdoor views from all angles.



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