

# Vintage can still be green

Making older homes  
more eco-friendly  
will be worth it.

By JENNIFER HILLER  
EXPRESS-NEWS BUSINESS WRITER

**S**ure, green building sounds like a fine idea for buyers of new homes.

After all, who doesn't want lower utility bills and fewer harsh chemicals inside their house?

But what if you're living in a 1920s bungalow and can feel a gentle breeze whenever you hold your hand up to a door or window?

Is there any hope?

As it turns out, there is.

People updating or remodeling historic homes — or even more recent homes that aren't very energy-efficient — have a variety of options that can help them cut their energy costs and make their home healthier.

For starters, consider the roof, the biggest problem area in South Texas homes.

"If you've got a couple of bucks to spend, use it on the roof," said Stephen Colley, an architect who helped develop San Antonio's green building program.

Dark roofs and traditional attic spaces act together to trap and heat air.

It's not uncommon for an attic temperature to reach 150 degrees when it's 100 degrees outside, making it difficult for an air conditioning unit to cool a home.

When it comes time for a new roof, Colley and others recommend light-colored roofing materials — white is best — that will help reflect light and heat in the summertime.

Standing seam metal roofs, commonly featured on green homes, also can save people 15 percent a year on homeowner's insurance because they are resistant to fire and hail damage.

To take it a step further, Colley says, people can have foam insulation blown against the roofline inside the attic.

In most homes, insulation is laid on the floor of the attic.

But insulation along a roofline creates conditioned space in the attic, giving homeowners a more pleasant storage area. It also keeps air conditioning ductwork in a cooler space.

The temperature in an attic with roof insulation rarely rises higher than about 85 degrees, even in the hottest months, said Cathy Talcott, president of the New Braunfels-based Cell U Insul, which installs soy-based polyurethane spray foam insulation.

"We call it a complete envelope of foam," Talcott said. "You're living in an ice chest." Foam insulation is typically 3 inches thick in the walls and 6 inches on the roofline.

Although many homeowners worry about needing more insulation in the walls, insulation on the sides of a house won't help nearly as much as roof insulation will, Talcott and Colley said.

"What people don't realize is that in our part of the world, the solar radiation is more severe on the roof than on any of the sides of the house," Colley said.

Installing the soy-based foam insulation in the walls and on the roofline a new 2,000-square-foot home would cost around \$8,000, or about 3½ times the cost of regular insulation, Talcott said.

Retrofitting a 2,000-square-foot home with only roofline insulation would cost around \$6,000.



J. MICHAEL SHORT/SPECIAL TO THE EXPRESS-NEWS

Green contractors and builders say even vintage homes like this one can be made more energy-efficient, say, by redoing the roof.

## SIMPLE WAYS TO GO GREEN

- Use compact fluorescent bulbs. They last 10 times longer than incandescent bulbs, use one-fourth as much energy and give off less energy as heat.
- Plant trees along the west side of your house, which shades the house during the hottest part of the day.
- Live close to work to cut gasoline costs.
- When you need to replace appliances, choose ones that have the EPA's Energy Star rating.
- When you're replacing a roof, choose metal or a light-colored material.
- When painting inside, use low- or no-VOC paint to improve indoor air quality.

Sources: Build San Antonio Green, CPS Energy

The result: a 30 percent to 50 percent savings in utilities, which, over several years, helps pay for the cost of installing the insulation.

"It's a whole different way to think about the house," Talcott said.

Build San Antonio Green doesn't currently have remodeling guidelines, but is developing them.

Similarly, the national Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design program hopes to develop a rating system for home remodels, said Heather Gayle, program manager with

said. "But there's a lot that people can do."

For instance, owners of historic or older homes can purchase green materials when remodeling.

Eco-sensitive paint and flooring are becoming easier to find and stores such as Green Home Outfitters in Blanco carry a variety of green products.

Colley advises homeowners to use interior paint with low- or no-volatile organic compounds. The new-paint smell is actually the scent of off-gassing of VOCs, the fumes that glues, formaldehyde, paints, varnishes and other common household chemicals release into the air as they age.

Similarly, carpeting is usually made from petroleum

products.

If you need new carpeting, choose natural fibers or carpeting made from recycled materials, he said.

There's a lot of green carpeting on the market, so it's one of the most competitively priced green products available.

And while it may seem difficult to do a green remodel on a vintage home, take heart in this: Remodeling and staying in your home is the "greenest" thing you can do.

"Stay where you're at," said Colley. "Even if you build a brand-new green home, you'd still be leaving another house behind. It's better to improve the existing building stock."

[jhillier@express-news.net](mailto:jhillier@express-news.net)

icynene insulation was blown along the interior of the roof in the attic of this home in the King William neighborhood to make the home more energy-efficient.

