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## Dream home: The green life

**Couple creates eco-friendly, LEED-certified cottage in Baltimore County**

December 08, 2010 | By Marie Marciano Gullard, Special to The Baltimore Sun

Living in Towson for six years, Debi Jarrell felt claustrophobic. She missed the open country of northwest Baltimore County where she was raised. The decision to move back to the small town of Trenton near Upperco would soon set her and domestic partner, Tim Hopkins, on a life-altering adventure into the realm of "green" construction coupled with elegant country style.

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Debi Jarrell and Tim Hopkins, above, in their family room, put... (Photo by Doug Kapustin, Special to The Baltimore Sun)

"Our primary goal was to build a one-story, 2,300-square-foot home that didn't intrude on the historic look and feel of the area," said Hopkins, 55 and co-owner of an information consulting firm. "We wanted to prove that 'building green' could be accomplished in a rural setting without 'building ugly.'"

The project, which began in 2007, would take two years of research and [design](#) to get exactly what they wanted. The couple purchased about an acre of land in Trenton with a stunning view of horse farms, rolling hills and valleys. They paid \$225,000 for the property and hired a builder, Bob Krieger of RHK Builders Inc.

"This would be his first 'green' house," Hopkins said of the finished product they moved into last December.

After spending \$425,000 on their grand plan, the couple lives in a cottage on a hill that boasts energy [efficiencies](#) like solar panels and a geothermal air conditioning and heating system and environmentally friendly design, including insulation made from recycled newspaper.

More green features can be found in the interior. All of the countertops are fashioned of a cement-based, recycled glass called ice stone, while the gleaming hardwood floors are made from recycled boards that once served as a horse fence. Perhaps most notable is the use of recycled concrete to create the exterior "stone" façade as well as the "stone" fireplace.

Hopkins helped the builder with all of the environmental, energy-efficient aspects of the home. His goal was for the house to meet the strict requirements for platinum [certification](#) from LEED — Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, as certified by the U.S. Green Building Council.

While the home is cottage-designed, its interior decor is relaxed country manor as opposed to country folksy.

"Debi was almost totally responsible for the design, furnishing, decorating and personal feel of the home," Hopkins said.

Inside an arched wooden door reminiscent of a fairytale cottage, an open floor plan defines the one-level home's great room, dining room and the kitchen/breakfast area. Bedrooms and baths are in wings on opposite sides of the central living space.

Noting that she likes working with a variety of textures, Jarrell has combined woven banana-leaf armchairs, a huge leather ottoman and a microfiber sofa of transitional design in a warm, fashionable grouping under the great room's 12-foot cathedral ceiling. A photograph of a buffalo taken in the snowy wilds of Yellowstone Park commands attention above the massive fireplace, giving a lodge-like appearance to the great room.

The breakfast room off of the kitchen features a cherry wood, Queen Anne-style half-curio cabinet, a round table painted black and matching chairs with wicker seats, all sitting on a woven rug.

Their comfortable cottage is "all we need [and] all we ever wanted," said Hopkins, who now assists the builder in marketing the green building materials and [technologies](#) installed in his home.

"The final product has exceeded our wildest expectations," he said, adding that the home also met their goal of a home that's certified as environmentally friendly.

"We were [just] officially certified LEED Platinum, the first home in Baltimore County to achieve that distinction," Hopkins said. "This designation also got us three years of free Baltimore County property taxes."

It's also allowed Jarrell, who grew up in that bucolic setting enjoying the open spaces, to return to her roots.

"The Trenton Church bells are so charming. It's so nice to come home after work, put stuff down, pick up a glass of [wine](#), go out on the deck and listen to the bells."

Have you found your dream home? Tell us about it. Send an e-mail to [homes@baltsun.com](mailto:homes@baltsun.com).

### Making the dream

**Dream element:** The location. Tim Hopkins and Debi Jarrell's "green" cottage sits on one of the highest points in northwest Baltimore County and overlooks open land, valleys, hills and a horse farm at the end of their property. From their deck, they can enjoy what Hopkins calls "our million-dollar view."

**Dream design:** The one-story, custom-built cottage was designed to be eco-friendly. The multi-gabled cedar-shake-and-stone construction is recycled vinyl and cement, respectively. "As we got into the building [process] we learned so much about energy and environmental choices," Hopkins said.