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19th-century
Santa Cruz scenics

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the soulful
songstress
of Monterey Bay

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conquers the world's
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GREEN from the ground UP

From its rainwater cistern to the solar system, this Santa Cruz home is certified environmentally sensible

By Kirsten Fairchild

At first glance, the home of Marcus and Kirsten Pohlmann doesn't look much different from the other houses in its Westside Santa Cruz neighborhood. Upon closer inspection, however, the modern Craftsman-style house is truly one of a kind.

From the 6,000-gallon rainwater cistern underneath the driveway that provides water for three toilets and a washing machine to a grey-water system filtering water from showers, baths and sinks to water the plants in the backyard, the Pohlmann house has been referred to as the greenest home in Santa Cruz County.

Natives of Germany, the Pohlmanns lived in Ohio prior to their move to Santa Cruz. Marcus, a real estate developer and contractor, first began envisioning his dream house after attending a 2006 trade show put on by the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC), a nonprofit organization dedicated to cost-efficient and energy-saving building design and construction. His 2,900-square-foot home, completed in March 2012, was the first in the county and one of the first in Northern California to be certified LEED-H platinum. (LEED, which stands for Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design and is a USGBC program that provides third-party verification of green buildings.)

"The platinum level is the highest possible rating given by the U.S. Green Building Council, so I wanted to set the bar high for this project," said Marcus, whose first visit to the area was in 1990 when Santa Cruz still showed effects of the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake. "It's absolutely the thing that makes economic sense. It is a healthier house to live in and it's the right thing to do because resources are getting rare. It feels good to be part of the solution."

Added Kirsten: "We wanted to show that a home could still look good and be green and efficient. We've actually exceeded the platinum rating by quite a bit."

Quite taken with Santa Cruz ever since his first visit, Marcus began visiting the area monthly, beginning in 2007. The couple purchased the property in 2009 and hired the San Francisco-based Feldman Architecture and builder Pete Testorff, of Testorff Construction Inc. in Aptos. Marcus said he selected Testorff because of their shared dedication to perfectionism.

"Marcus wasn't going to settle for anything less than what he wanted," Testorff said. "He's really a visionary — he's ahead of the curve on these issues. The carbon footprint of the house is so tiny, but the house really has functional space. He's set up a model of what the new standard is going to be."

When the property's existing structure was demolished in 2010, 86 percent of the materials were reused or recycled, Marcus said. The new house was built using a 2x6 framing



The great room is separated from the kitchen by open-structured wood partitions made of rift white oak.



Although completely green the modern Craftsman-style house blends in seamlessly in its Westside Santa Cruz neighborhood.

system with Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)-certified lumber — a framing system that uses fewer materials yet allows for more insulation.

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With four bedrooms and two-and-a-half bathrooms, the house is directed southward to take advantage of natural light. With a 14kW solar system, the home produces more energy than it uses. An air-source heat pump warms the radiant floors and provides hot water.

"Part of the LEED certification is to source many materials from close by," said Marcus. His website, santacruzhaus.com, is dedicated to the project and lists the participating contractors and design and development team members, including three Santa Cruz-based businesses — Santa Cruz Radiant, Illuminée Lighting and Solcon Solar Construction



A brightly colored sitting room in the 300-square-foot guesthouse also doubles as the home's media room.



The polished concrete floors, which have the look of black marble, provide a beautiful surface for the dining room which separates the living room from the kitchen.



The sleek, open kitchen features an energy-saving Bosch 800 36-inch induction electric range with speed boost technology that heats up water twice as fast as a conventional stove. Pure white, sustainably manufactured Caesarstone quartz counter tops are both beautiful and practical; the non-porous surface prevents mold and microbes, and is low-maintenance to decrease detergent usage.



The home's exterior siding is a cementitious fiber board which has high fire resistance, moisture and rot resistance and a longer cycle time between painting.

— as well as Dave Merchant from Out of the Woods in Bonny Doon and SculptureTech LLC of Watsonville, to name a few.

The Pohlmanns, married for 20 years with three young children, opted for a contemporary open floor plan featuring a great room on

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the first level that opens up to an outdoor patio and a 300-square-foot guesthouse. The patio is designed for year-round use, with an Ecosmart indoor/outdoor fireplace that burns denatured ethanol in the fire box. Inside, the same fireplace can warm the great room, which is separated from the kitchen by open-structured wood partitions made of rift white oak. The sleek, open kitchen features an energy-saving Bosch 800 36-inch induction electric range with



An indoor/outdoor Ecosmart x1 denatured ethanol burning fire box occupies the exterior of the home's patio.



Heated by Ecosmart indoor/outdoor fireplace, the home's patio is designed for year-round use.

speed boost technology that heats up water twice as fast as a conventional stove. Pure white sustainably manufactured Caesarstone quartz counter tops are both beautiful and practical; the non-porous surface prevents mold and microbes and is low-maintenance to decrease detergent usage. The smooth floors, which look almost like black marble, are made of polished concrete. Moving upstairs, which consists of all bedrooms, the floors are made of tan oak, a "waste tree" in local redwood forests. The bathroom tiles are made from recycled bath ceramics, and every painted surface was done with low-emission paint.

The two-car garage is wired for an electric car, which is on the couple's wish list but isn't a pressing need. The Pohlmanns' home is located within walking distance of just about anywhere they'd want to go, and a bus stop with connection to downtown is nearby. Walkscore.com gave the address a "very walkable" score of 82.

"The walkability factor of this location was just 'huge,'" said Kirsten, who worked in real estate and investment banking before becoming a full-time mother. "We don't have to drive everywhere. We can walk to restaurants, a brewery, a bakery and a grocery store. We walk to the ocean every day. The house is just perfect for what we need." ☘