

Finding Paradise on Picardy

The surprise email came in around noon on a Friday. “Hey! I’m Mary Sue’s daughter and I wanted to thank you for doing such a beautiful job remodeling my parents’ home! I truly love everything that you did to transform this wonderful home for the young couple that will bring new life to it. Best of luck and success with your future endeavors.”

Mary Sue and Oscar built their new brick ranch home on a quiet cul-de-sac on Picardy Place in the Oak Park subdivision in Raleigh in 1963, and moved in January of 1964. They lived there together until Oscar’s passing in 1995. Mary Sue continued to live in the home until her health declined and she moved to an Assisted Living facility in early 2012. Her Power of Attorney (POA) and long-time family friend was tasked with selling her home as quickly as possible in order to return the funds to her estate to provide for her continuing long-term care.

The home still had the original electrical and plumbing fixtures, cabinets, flooring, and door hardware; and was largely un-insulated. Dark wood paneling and solid doors separating the front of the house from the back presented a dark and outdated environment.



Based on the sluggish Real Estate market conditions and a professional assessment of the property, her POA concluded that in its current condition the

home would sit on the market for many months and that he would eventually be forced to take a fire-sale offer. He asked Cary, NC Builder Jeff Wiblitzhouser, President of Paradise Found Construction, to take on the task of renovating the house, which included gutting and redesigning both baths and the kitchen, and reconfiguring walls to create a brighter and more open and inviting atmosphere. He teamed up with Interior Designer Kathy Gariboldi of Raleigh’s reInvented Spaces to help with amenity and color selections and went to work.

Wiblitzhouser understood the market value of not only updating the home to reflect current interior design trends, but also of taking the necessary steps to significantly increase the home’s energy and water usage efficiency while these updates were being done. He convinced Mary Sue’s POA to make a modest investment in air-sealing measures and adding additional insulation, and installed EPA Energy Star Qualified electrical fixtures and appliances, EPA Water Sense rated toilets and plumbing fixtures, and CFL lighting at little to no extra cost.

He called in Durham’s Southern Energy Management to conduct performance testing and validate the efficiency improvements in energy and water, as well as the air-sealing and indoor air quality improvements and other improvements necessary for the Home to be Certified Green.

Additional green features of the home included refinishing the existing hardwood floors with a no-Volatile Organic Compounds (VOC) clear coat finish, installing durable next-generation porcelain tile, and using no-VOC carpet and paints to create a healthy and light-filled living environment. The spectacular granite countertops featured in the kitchen and bathrooms served as the design palette to create a wonderfully harmonious balance of muted tones throughout the home.

As a result of the updates and Green Certification, the home was sold to a young family within three days of construction completion.

The Importance of Green Certified Building

Jeff Wiblitzhouser is passionate about Green Building, and the importance of Green Certified Remodels and new homes to not only the nation, but also to local communities. “Finding Paradise



on Picardy” is a typical example of smaller single-family homes that were built in abundance during the economic expansion following the end of WW II. These homes represent a significant percentage of dwellings in many communities, and are often in neighborhoods that are in desirable locations in the community, have larger lot sizes, and established traffic patterns.

At the time they were constructed, many of the building science techniques and products relating to energy and water efficiency were largely unavailable or unknown. The harmful effects of chemical off-gassing of common home construction material, furniture, and cleaning chemicals were also unknown or misunderstood. These older homes can be easily renovated with a relatively modest investment in insulation, water usage, air sealing, and energy-efficient heating and cooling equipment, light fixtures and appliances; all of which add up to huge cost savings.

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The Value of Revitalizing our Existing Communities

As the scarcity and price of our natural resources continues to rise, it becomes increasingly critical to our National Security that we continue to make measurable progress toward independence from foreign sources of energy. A collective movement toward increasing the energy and water efficiencies in these older homes will contribute significantly toward achieving these vital National goals. Rather than demolish structurally sound and functional older homes to make way for larger homes with larger carbon footprints, renovating them sustainably and to reflect current design trends and amenities that today's buyers want, makes these homes attractive to home buyers. It provides an opportunity to bring younger families into these older neighborhoods, giving them new life, and at the same time, raising community property values.

Economic Value of Green Certified Homes

The reduced energy and water usage of a Green Certified Home translates into real dollar savings each and every year of the home's operation. Reduced maintenance costs obtained through the use of more durable building materials and superior building science practices also serves to reduce total cost of ownership of your home. These cost savings translate into positive dollar savings every year, and contribute to paying back any initial investment costs in resource efficiency upgrades. Once the initial investment is paid back, any savings going forward (adjusted for inflation) provide a positive cash flow and return on your investment!

By lowering the total cost of ownership of these homes, they become even more affordable and attractive. This becomes particularly important for older members of the community who may depend on a fixed income in their later years of life. As an added benefit of the renovation process, all outdated but still usable products and building materials are easily removed and re-cycled through community based non-profit business's such as Habitat For Humanity.

"Healthiness" of Green Certified Homes

The health and comfort of a home's occupants is a primary goal of a Green Certified Home. Measures are taken to eliminate air intrusion (drafts), properly control humidity levels, and eliminate hot/cold spots within the home. Indoor air quality can be affected by gases (including carbon monoxide, radon, volatile organic compounds), particulates, mold, bacteria, or any energy stressor that can induce adverse health conditions. Eliminating the source of these contaminants is key, and controlling the humidity, moisture, and unfiltered air of a home is critical.

Competitive Market Advantage

The "Finding Paradise on Picardy" Green Certified Remodel project was undertaken in order to quickly sell the home, and it accomplished this by being sold within days of being listed. Many of these homes are located in desirable neighborhoods within their communities, and remodeling them to be Green Certified and offering modern amenities makes them attractive to buyers, helping to raise other property values within the neighborhood. Green Certified Homes continue to demonstrate increased buyer interest, command higher new construction and resale values, and spend fewer days on the market compared to traditionally built structures. They spend much less time on the market, and can command a premium price.

Home Tour Open House

President and owner Jeff Wiblitzhouser entered the project for consideration as the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) 2013 National Project of the Year for Green Certified Remodel and it won.

The national and local award-winning Green Certified Home "Finding Paradise on Picardy" will be open to the public to view and experience during the Green Home Tour on the weekend of April 21-22. The address is 5010 Picardy Place, Raleigh. See page 29.

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