

A NEW SHADE OF GREEN

Neptune Norte is awarded the highest environmental certification

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In 1979, when gasoline lines were long and “green design” usually meant something in the era’s distinctive avocado shade, brothers Steve and Jeff Adams built their first home designed to reduce energy usage and improve indoor air quality.

In July 2012, the brothers reached a pinnacle of green home design when the U.S. Green Building Council awarded the Leucadia luxury home they completed in January their highest certification, LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Platinum, making it only the third custom home in the county with the certification.

But the contemporary three-story house, dubbed Neptune Norte, would take on even deeper meaning when Steve Adams, the architectural and landscape designer for the 5,617-square-foot home, died in September.

“As one of the last projects he designed that was constructed, it was a metaphor for the arc of his career,” said Ursula McDonald, Steve’s daughter and office manager for his company, Adams Design Associates. The home, she explained, features many elements of the Pacific Rim-tropical style he developed working around the world, including outdoor rooms, two outdoor fireplaces, two outdoor showers and mosaic-tiled fountain and Jacuzzi.

Jeff Adams, president of Wave Crest General Contracting, concurs. “It was a culmination of all these experiences, combining indoor and outdoor spaces and environmental concerns,” Adams said. (The home was featured in a Sept. 17, 2011, San Diego Coastal Homes story about a nexus of LEED Platinum homes on Neptune Avenue.)

The brothers did not set out to build a LEED home, but decided to go for the platinum certification when the homeowner asked for photovoltaic solar cells, vegetated roofs, organic gardens and a rainwater cistern for irrigation. “I said, ‘Gosh, that’s the high hanging fruit, the most expensive things, so if you’re going to do that let’s take it to LEED,’ ” Adams recounted.

“I just feel we need to move away from fossil fuels, and all those green features add to the insulation of the house and the livability of the house, the long-term sustainability,” said homeowner Christy Walton, philanthropist and widow of Walmart heir John Walton, known locally for the donation of her family’s National City home to the International Community Foundation. That home is now part of the Olivewood Gardens and Learning Center.

Many of the energy-efficient features Adams is most proud of are hidden, such as the blown-in recycled cellulose insulation, alternate framing that reduces cold spots, enclosed duct work, high-efficiency heating and much more.

The casual elegance and indoor-outdoor living that Steve Adams was known for is visible throughout his design for the five-bedroom-suite home and one-bedroom-one-bathroom guesthouse.

That style is evident in the great room, which spans most of the top floor of the reverse-floor plan house. “There was definite agreement on the great room,” said JoAnn Shannon of Property Insights, the owner’s representative and project manager. “Everything was oriented toward the view.”

One deck overlooks Neptune Avenue (which Adams likened to a boardwalk with its walkers and surfers) and the ocean, while a more private side deck off the kitchen houses the barbecue and outdoor dining area. “Another consideration there is the wind. A lot of the year you need shelter from the wind,” Walton said.

The kitchen includes a green-gray glass tile backsplash, concrete counters, energy-efficient stainless-steel appliances and Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certified sycamore wood cabinets.

Sustainability of design and materials was key throughout the home, as the mosaic tiles, manufactured by Kirei and made from reclaimed coconut shells, in the third-floor powder room attest.

The Adams brothers, Walton and Shannon, selected the finishes but brought in interior designer Kristianne Watts of KW Designs to pick colors and furnishings after Walton’s plans changed and she opted to sell the house. (It will be on the market March 1.)

Watts selected low-VOC, muted paint colors that complement the FSC-certified engineered white oak wood floors in much of the home and the jute carpeting in the bedrooms. Many pieces were reclaimed, repurposed or made sustainably, such as the Mexican butaca chairs in the great room, which are covered with reclaimed jute coffee sacks.

Fabrics and artwork provide pops of color throughout. In the master bedroom on the second floor, wall art by Leucadia artist John Peugh made from recycled surfboard resin picks up the blues and greens in the fabrics and furniture.

At Walton's behest, Steve Adams designed the second-floor bedrooms to be ample but not huge in order to widen the hallway that opens to the side courtyard. That openness is carried throughout the house — even to the first-floor garage and storage room, which are wide and light.

Walton credits Adams' indoor and outdoor designs for the sense of calm people feel in the home. "You want your place to be a peaceful place ..." she said. "He did that very well."

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