

Fine living: Tiburon eco-house is 'off the charts'

PJ Bremier

Posted: 10/25/2008 12:29:57 AM PDT

What would you think of a gorgeous house in Tiburon that, according to the Mill Valley architect who remodeled it, was so well-done and so energy-efficient that it's "off the charts?"

This month, judges of the San Francisco chapter of the National Association of the Remodeling Industry's Remmies Award Competition had to do just that. And, after they thought about it, they recognized it with two awards. A merit award went to Mahoney Architects & Interiors for best entire home remodel over \$1 million and a first place award for best green building went to SoundVision, a Novato custom electronics integrator company.

"The judges were looking for design and innovation and, in this particular house, they appreciated the opening-up to the outdoors and the beautiful views," NARI's president, David Freer says.

Mahoney Architects & Interiors transformed the '80s-era 4,750-square-foot ranch-style house into a sleek contemporary dwelling for its casual-living but eco-minded owners. One of the most striking changes was removing the wall that enclosed the kitchen and opening up the space to the dining and living spaces so that it, too, shared a spectacular view of Angel Island.

"The house needed modernizing," Mahoney designer Laura Leo says. "It had gone through some obvious remodels over the decades and had become choppy. The owners didn't want to expand, they liked the size, but they really wanted it to be energy-efficient and that drove our design."

In fact, architect Colleen Mahoney says, "green design is the forward focus of our firm." (Her Mill Valley office, which also won a NARI merit award for best commercial interior this year, is headquartered above her new green-products showroom, Green by Design.)

Surpassing LEED criteria, this house is so green, it's considered a zero-energy home, producing more energy than it consumes through four approaches: conserving energy, using energy-conserving materials and energy-conserving systems and monitoring the water, electricity and gas usage. The monitoring shows up on a graph on the computer screen of an home resource monitor.

"Right now, the only way homeowners can see how much energy they're consuming is when they get their PG&E bill. With a home resource monitor, you can see where you're saving energy and it shines a light on where you can make changes to reduce your overall carbon footprint."

Recycled denim and soy-based foam insulate the walls; all lighting is energy-efficient; a 12kW photovoltaic system feeds energy back to the PG&E grid during peak hours; Forest Stewardship Council-certified maple wood was used for the flooring and cabinetry; counters and surfaces



Exterior shot of the Tiburon house after \$1 million remodel by Mahoney Architects & Interiors, which won the 2008 Remmie. (Provided by Andrew McKinney)

were topped with eco-friendly Caesarstone and Zodiac and no-VOC finishes; and rainwater is harvested for landscaping.

"Everything is state-of-the-art in this home," Mahoney says, and in terms of green, "there won't be another one quite like it because what the clients wanted was almost impossible to do."

One of those impossible things was to have all plug-ins burning up energy while on 24-hour standby turned off automatically when not in use, reducing energy use by 70 percent. Even the refrigerator is turned off a few hours each night.

"We've done integrated systems for years, but this client challenged us to find ways to shut things off," says SoundVision's principal designer, Gene Quisisem. "It's really a breakthrough project. What we hope, though, is that manufacturers take notice and build in automatic energy-conserving modes in their products."

The hitch, he thinks, is that manufacturers believe that consumers want "instant on" from their televisions, stereo systems or computer monitors. Quisisem insists that there's very little delay and that the huge energy savings make it an easy trade-off. "Consumers really want to turn things off!"

In this home, the entertainment, lighting, HVAC, security and energy-management systems are all displayed on home dashboards, making "it easy to see all the systems at a glance in one location," he says.

According to Quisisem, this project represents a more subtle breakthrough in green. "The award we won for best green building usually goes to architects and builders. I think we won because NARI judges recognize that a large component of green design will include green technology. It's a category that the green movement hasn't focused on yet because it's focused more on material and LEED certification. They haven't gotten a grasp on how to leverage technology."

PJ Bremier writes on home, garden, design and entertaining topics every Saturday. She may be contacted at P.O. Box 412, Kentfield 94914 or pj@mindspring.com.