

Spring Issue: Creating A Classic Farm House with Panelization & Sustainable Style

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Builders Tim Holk and Martha Braustein found success by concentrating on historic designs, crafting homes that looked like they have graced the landscape for hundreds of years. One of their recent completions is the perfect example of old world charm combined with a state-of-the-art sustainable design. “We learned a lot about building on this project,” recalls Tim Holk, partner with Martha Braustein in Columbia County Historic Homes (North Chatham, NY). “Much of the lessons came from the owners, Tom and Sarah Crowell. It was their ideas to use a lot of the different materials and building strategies. We used an ICF (insulated concrete form) foundation in combination with Icynene spray foam insulation. The entire house, top to bottom, has one of the tightest envelopes one can create.”

Green Dream Home

The 3,328 sqft. home with a 624-sqft. barn home was designed in November of 2005 and built during 2006, using a mix of sustainable materials. The eco-friendly home started with a panelized framing package from [Connor Homes](#), a longtime panel manufacturer that specializes in historic designs--what some are calling the New Old Home Trend. In addition to providing the envelope of the home, Connor Homes also provided stairs, doors, and interior trim.



These sustainable materials were augmented by efforts by the homeowner, who found salvaged wood floors from Antique & Vintage Woods of America and reclaimed light fixtures, which were used throughout the house. “Many of these fixtures were heirlooms from their families,” Martha Braunstein, Holks building partner. Additionally, the homeowners specified recycled and reclaimed materials wherever possible, including stones for landscaping found on the building site.

Holk and Baunstein provided the cherry kitchen cabinets and they built a custom library milled on site from cherry trees harvested right on the building site. Both passive and active solar heating were used in the design. Expanses of glass provided by large double hung windows and triple french doors with transoms above allow plenty of natural light to flood the house and bring its warmth inside in winter months.

Two types of solar panels on the southern roof exposure provide solar heating and solar domestic hot water. The house has grid-tied photovoltaics, Lifebreath heat recovery ventilation, radiant floor heating, a high efficiency propane boiler, low flow toilets, energy efficient appliances. “I just had dinner with the owners the other night. Their electric bill is incredibly low during the winter and in the summer, they sell energy back to the local utility company,” Tim Holk says.



The cutting edge framing package, the increased insulation and energy-efficient appliances, all add up to a home that qualified for a five-star rating from the DOE’s EnergyStar program. “It’s the highest rating they have,” says Tim Holk.

Because the house is so energy efficient, only non-toxic and low VOC finishes were used in the home to preserve healthy indoor air quality. The house is a unique example of using a building system to create a green home with a classic New England design appeal.

Switching to a Building System

Tim and Martha switched from site building to a building system in the year 2000. “And we haven’t built a site built home since,” Tim says. “We do that predominantly because we enjoy the precision of the panelized system and it’s really pleasant to work with Connor Homes. We can’t say enough about them, we use them exclusively. They have a great eye for historic detail. Anything that the panelized system may add in cost, is more than off set in time savings in framing and reduced call backs.”



Martha and Time are big believers in building sustainably. They are about to embark on an ambitious 89-lot green development, called Mill Run, which will employ a wide range of sustainable building strategies to preserve the rural nature of the site, which comes with a flourishing trout stream.

The 89 green homes, clustered on just 17.5 acres within the 125-acre development, will come with a long laundry list of green features, including solar panels and cisterns to collect rain water. Tim and Martha are augmenting that with community vegetable gardens and fruit trees. They are also exploring a farming component as well on the remaining land within the development.

“We’re looking at a number of different options, including chickens, dairy herd, sheep or even water buffalo, which produce a milk that is highly prized for making mozzarella cheese,” says Tim.

Although it’s some of the worst times for new home builders in our nation’s history, Tim and Martha are still enthusiastic about their development and optimistic for its success.

“Our time is pretty bad,” says Tim Holk. “But just imagine a whole bank of solar panels on the site with livestock grazing underneath. I think this is the kind of development that will resonate with new home buyers interested in sustainable living.”

