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VOL. 1, NO. 3

APRIL 2008

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Introducing pieceHomes: a line of green, factory-built modular homes by Davis Studio Architecture + Design. They have a focus on designing smaller homes that will be affordable to a wider range of customers and that are particularly well suited for infill urban lots. Depending on the house, finish materials and location, every home will use a simple palate of green materials, energy-efficient technologies and sustainable construction practices.

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ON THE COVER
Expands Vision for Green Living



Builder/Architect

LOS ANGELES/FOOTHILLS EDITION

our 71st year

Publisher: Juanita Garner

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SUNSHINE MEDIA

Builder/Architect is published by Sunshine Media, Inc., 8283 N. Hayden Rd., Ste 220, Scottsdale, AZ 85258

Phone (480) 522-2900 | sunshinemediacom

Subscription rates: \$36.00 per year; \$62.00 two years; \$3.50 single copy.

Advertising rates on request. Bulk third class mail paid in Tucson, AZ.

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pieceHomes

pH: For a Balanced Home

By Karen P. Dodd

Even before Al Gore appeared on the scene pushing his “green” campaign, Davis Studio Architecture + Design had already launched their own crusade to introduce green/eco-friendly living to the masses. Jonathan and Mary Jo Davis make up the Los Angeles-based husband-and-wife team as architect and designer, respectively. Jonathan and Mary Jo are dynamic together and respect each other’s area of expertise. “I push Jonathan in his architecture and he pushes me in design,” says Mary Jo. The couple is able to combine their individual artistic skills to create brilliant green schemes. “When a client hires Davis Studio, they hire Jonathan and Mary Jo as a team with our talents,” adds Jonathan adamantly.

As an architect, Jonathan has abandoned common designs and ventured into a style that most would be reluctant to attempt. Clean lines, slants and diagonals with unconventional square-shaped rooms are just some of Davis Studio’s trademarks. To their credit, they have designed and built several “green” houses.

Nestled beneath the majestic Rocky Mountains of Colorado rests The Bell Mountain residence. This stunning home features sustainable materials, such as recycled steel roofing, radiant heat, recycled glass tile and drought-tolerant landscaping. Large windows present a breathtaking view outside the residence. In addition to The Bell Mountain home, the Davises have also built The Nute resi-



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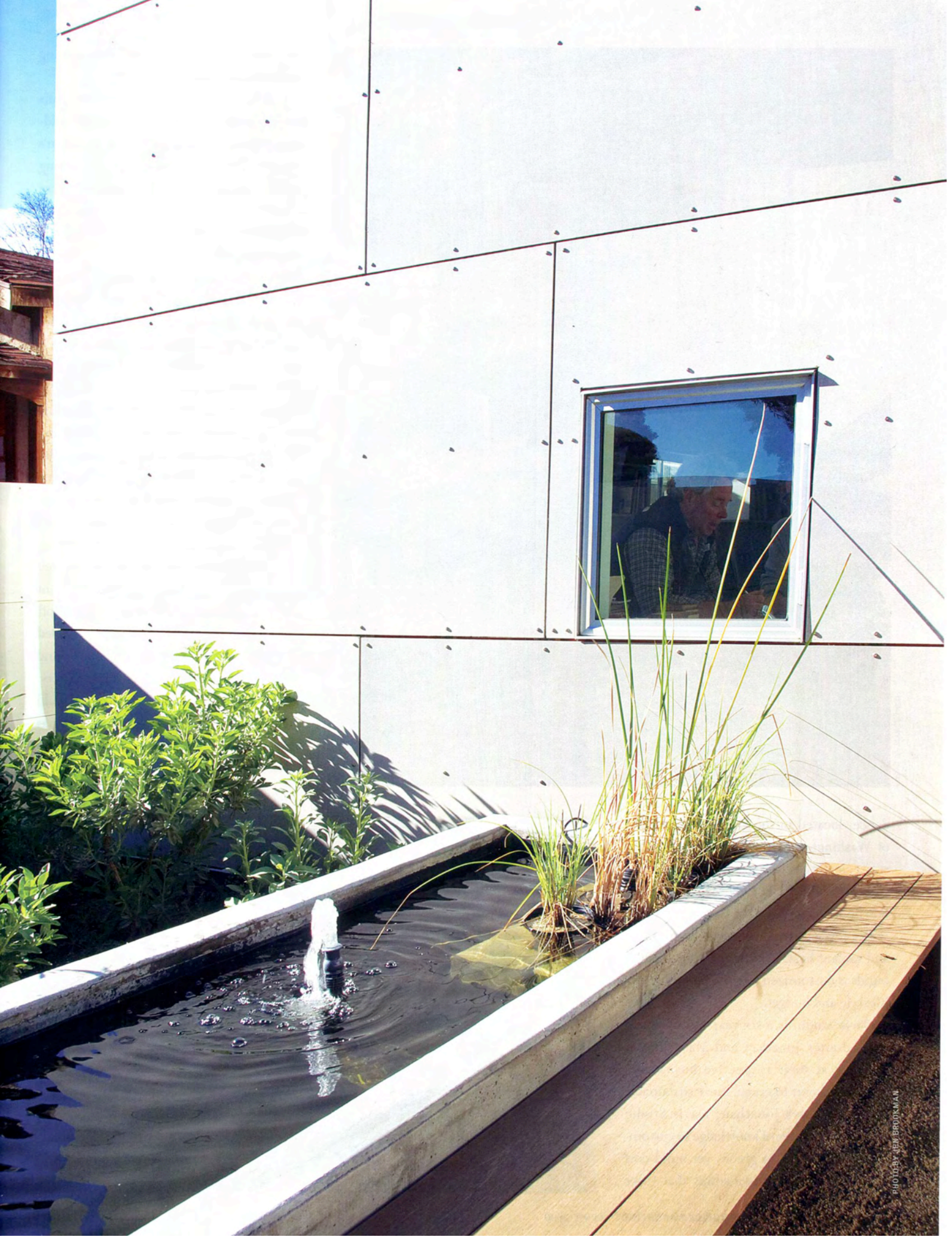


PHOTO BY JEFF BROOKMAN



PHOTO BY MYNOR IXCO

can be budget issues at times, but building green doesn't have to be costly.

Jonathan was born in England and hails from a family who owns a 170-year-old building company in England. One of Jonathan's earliest childhood recollections was helping his father around the house, hammering here and there, looking for anything to remodel. He liked to construct and reconstruct Lego formations or take plans from the newspaper and rework them to his own design. The fact that his father was not in the family business run by his grandfather and uncle did not deter his destiny as an architect. "Architecture is in my blood," Jonathan says without hesitation. "It's natural to be doing this." At age 23, Jonathan contracted and built his first sustainable house in Shreveport, LA. Realizing that this was something he was born to do, Jonathan made it his career goal to continue building sustainable houses. Mary Jo, on the other hand, grew up in Seattle, but remembers drawing a lot as a child. Moving on in life, she received a B.F.A. and worked for a small design company and then went on to be a senior art director at Microsoft Corp. Mary Jo has designed and remodeled a Santa Monica bungalow, yoga studios and completed many original design projects. This extraordinary team went on to build their prized sustainable home, which has brought them wide acclaim — their Venice Boulevard showcase.

dence, located in the Cascade Mountains of Washington State. This green home is strategically sheltered among untouched trees and wildlife. The house features bamboo floors, engineered beams, a metal roof with recycled steel, concrete countertops and radiant heat. Each home Davis Studio builds is customized to their clients' taste, lifestyle and budget.

Davis Studio is a six-year-old company formed after Jonathan and Mary Jo met working at their respective businesses. "Our mission is to create more sustainable buildings," says Jonathan. Davis Studio offers a wide range of knowledge to customers who want to go green, yet build cost effectively. The Davises admit that there



PHOTO BY JEN BROOKMAN



PHOTO BY JEN BROOKMAN

The project began with the purchase of an empty lot and resulted in a three-story, eco-friendly home, 17 feet wide and 2,049 square feet. The numerous challenges included cost and time restraints, as well as effective space utilization. Among other challenges, the small lot was located on busy Venice Boulevard across the street from a high school. However, the Davises braved the obstacles and went on to complete their green home. "It took about eight months to build this house, and I was the contractor. This is our house. We designed every aspect about it. It's a great collaboration," Jonathan states proudly. The exterior of this all-wood-framed home is clad in galvanized corrugated steel, high in recycled steel content, which playfully reflects the changing conditions of the sky; cementitious panels; stucco; and an Indonesian wood, Red Balau, harvested from managed forests.

The Venice Boulevard green showcase welcomes visitors with a beautiful Zen-like water display in a small courtyard outside the main door to the first level of the house. This is an obviously well-planned feature. Not only is it pleasing to the eye, but the sounds of the water, to some degree, drown out the sounds of the busy boulevard. The two-story front wall of the house closes off common distractions from the outside. In fact, the Davises call the wall "the shield." Once inside, there is no indication that a high school sits directly across the street or that there are neighbors on either side. The floor is concrete and warmed by radiant heat. The design of the lower-level studio is simple and functional. Several computers



PHOTO BY MYNOR IXCO



PHOTO BY JEN BROOKMAN

occupy a long work space that the Davises call the “democratic desk.” The office is straightforward in its design and has achieved a peaceful, clutter-free work environment. The built-ins are out of the way and perfectly hide company files, paperwork, etc.

Mary Jo has a room that adjoins the office for painting and drawing. Her work room is just the right dimensions for creativity. Around the corner from Mary Jo’s workspace is the couple’s yoga room, which — when necessary — can double as a meeting place. Large storage walls provide an attractive amenity, in which items can be stored away, never revealing their true identity. There is a feeling of peace and tranquility when looking through the sliding glass door to the garden landscaped with native California plants, all of which are Jonathan and Mary Jo’s personal selection. The first level also includes a utility room, a tankless water heater, a solar inverter and a control panel that regulates the radiant heating system.

The second level is comprised of three bedrooms. One is a loft, which overlooks the downstairs studio, utilizing bright but soothing colors. The floors in the bedrooms and hall are made from cork. The master bedroom boasts a floating bed, built-ins attached to the headboard and a master bath. The bathroom floors are tiles made of a blend of recycled cork and rubber. Each bathroom has water-saving fixtures, as well as trough sinks for a touch of elegance.

Made of hemp, the shower curtains dry quickly and are mold resistant. The sliding barn doors at the entrance of two of the rooms are conversation pieces in themselves. The storage cabinets and cleverly placed built-ins were made with wheat board. Plumbing lines, cables and wires are hidden in an easy-access plywood soffit a few inches below the ceiling. The windows and high ceilings are bonuses, which allow light and air to flood into the rooms and emphasize the home’s magnificence. The Davises combined the theme of openness with effortless, brilliant designs to create volume within the spaces.

The third level follows the overall theme of functional design and effective space utilization to create a sense of openness and tranquility. The kitchen, dining and living area converge into one flowing space — like a stream. The Davises took a fresh approach to the conventional kitchen/dining room design and created a unique indoor/outdoor living area, choosing people-friendly, environmentally safe materials and systems that save energy, as well as money.

The kitchen counter is made of Paperstone and is situated next to one of the two sliding glass doors in the living space. The refrigerator is neatly tucked away in an alcove of sorts. The dining and living area, when arranged, can seat in excess of 25 people. On a tranquil summer day, the breeze from the ocean complements any gathering,

whether in or out of doors. The focus of the Davis home is family, friends and guests. The green style inspires a warm, welcome and comfortable feeling.

The third floor also offers a breathtaking winter view of the snow-capped San Gabriel Mountains, as well as the local Santa Monica Mountains. A staircase for third floor egress was built on the exterior of the house and is a wooden sculptural element at the back of the house. The staircase has been an object of observation, discussion and curiosity and has been written about in several articles. Anyone who sees this magnificent home will come to appreciate it as a work of art.

The roof has photovoltaic solar panels, which produce all the electricity needed for the house and actually deposit green electricity back into the grid for use by others in Los Angeles. The Davises willingly and proudly show off their Venice Boulevard home, advocating that healthy, eco-friendly living is beneficial to all of humanity and our planet.

The Davises want to share the rewards of sustainability on a global level, and have therefore designed — and introduced — a line of green factory-built modular homes called “pieceHomes.” The concept for pieceHomes is to design smaller affordable homes for a wide range of customers. Each home will be composed of green materials, energy-efficient technology and sustainable application. Says Jonathan: “It’s as easy as building the home in a factory, bringing it out, stacking or wrapping it, finishing it off and you’ve got a house.” The customer has a variety of pieceHomes to choose from, including *Venice Two*, *Wrap Tower*, *Container House*, *Solar Passage*, *Wrap House*, *Single* and *Double*. Most pieceHomes can be built in one year or less, depending on the project and budget. For more information on Davis Studio’s pieceHomes, visit www.piecehomes.com.

Davis Studio is concerned about what their clients want, offering custom architectural services, such as budget advice, family lifestyle considerations, as well as visual assistance, green consultation and client feedback. “We want to incorporate our vision along with the customer’s to produce a solution to their housing needs. It’s very much about working with the clients,” Jonathan explains. The Davises are all about simplicity and functionality. “It’s not about stuff you put in it, but it’s about the space and light, the views, the ventilation, how the sun is coming in



PHOTO BY JEN BROOKMAN

and the elements themselves are quite simple,” states Jonathan. Clients are steered toward choosing green, but are never forced into it. Wherever possible, the clients are also encouraged to use sustainable materials.

Davis Studio is a stickler for responsible environmental interaction. When building in areas of dense foliage, the Davises take extra pains to preserve tree and other plant life. Their concern about the effects of harmful toxins is seen in their selection of nontoxic paints, varnishes and oils, and woods that don’t give off VOC. They also use recycled cotton/denim for insulation instead of fiberglass. Mary Jo remembers that one of the painters thanked them for choosing nontoxic paints.

Although Davis Studio has several L.A. projects, they have not had an opportunity to build in the Foothills area yet. Many builders and architects across the country — as well as East Coast green enthusiasts — are making contact with the Davises. The possibil-



PHOTO BY MYNOR LYCO

ity of building in the Foothills area could happen very soon since the Davises want to service clients in every area possible.

The couple is also looking for opportunities to build for charity. "Ultimately, I would love to build a green house and donate it to Habitat for Humanity or auction off the house and give them the proceeds," says Mary Jo. "We want to help people who are helping people." Jonathan has thoughts of using green materials to build a church or sanctuary in order to help a congregation. "It's a very important aspect of who we are," says Jonathan.

So what does the future hold for Davis Studio? The Davises would like to establish their pieceHomes as a recognized brand and build reasonably priced homes that more people can afford. They can envision in the next 5-10 years expanding their scope beyond residential work and into building schools, museums, churches, municipal buildings, etc., but with the same philosophy.

Davis Studio is capturing the market for green modular homes due to their ideals and push for healthier living. Davis Studio has been featured in the *Los Angeles Times*, *Rocky Mountain News*, *Yogi Times* and HDTV online, Dwell.com and LowImpactLiving.com. The Davises aspirations for their business are on the rise and could quickly expand nationwide.

Jonathan and Mary Jo do not consider themselves forerunners of the green message, but rather foot soldiers who carry green education to the world. As more customers turn to the green way of living, it is safe to say that part of the transition is due to Davis Studio's tireless promotions of healthy and eco-friendly living, coupled with a great talent for design. Keep up the green work, Davis Studio!

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