



# Unintentional ECO

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BILL AND  
DIANE DEMEO  
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TO BUILD A  
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IT JUST  
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lvis Presley stood at the microphone in a Nashville studio in January 1956 and in less than three hours had recorded the song that introduced him to the world. “Heartbreak Hotel” became the music legend’s first No.

1 record and was the best-selling single of the year. Almost 50 years to the day that song was recorded, developers tore down the studio to make room for a parking lot. A sad story, maybe. But not for Bill and Diane DeMeo.

Two months after the demolition, a piece of that studio arrived at the site of Bill and Diane’s future home in West Austin. Six pieces, actually. The set of six arched steel trusses that had formed the curved ceiling of the recording studio was transported on a gooseneck trailer and would later become the dictating design element of the DeMeo home. Together

“The original sketch of the house was done on an envelope, and we signed off on it right there.”

with Architect Tom Hatch, the design team at Hatch + Ulland Owen Architects and a host of builders and contractors, Bill and Diane created a modern, industrial, eco-friendly home centered around the Elvis studio castoffs.

“Even if they had come from Dick Cheney’s outhouse, I still would have used them,” Bill says of the 58-foot steel trusses.

**PREVIOUS PAGE:** The main living space in Bill and Diane DeMeo’s home is one large room where the dining room, kitchen and living room flow seamlessly together. **THIS PAGE:** The welcoming committee: Bill and Diane and their dogs, Lucy and Ditto. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** A wall of windows and sliding glass doors stretches 17-feet high, but low-E windows and a north-facing orientation reduce direct sunlight in the room and help with energy costs.



A self-proclaimed eBay junkie, Bill says the house wasn't necessarily green by design, but green by default. "We found that green technologies were the best technologies to do what we wanted," he says. The roof is a set of structured insulated panels, which can reduce energy consumption by 50 percent. The home has low-flow, dual-flush toilets and a low-usage dishwasher and washing machine. All the home's water comes

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from the 15,000-gallon rainwater collection system, tucked away on the back of the property. To control for summer heat and winter cold, eco-friendly and energy-efficient icynene spray-foam insulation and a wood stove regulate the indoor temperature.

"We don't try to think of ways to make homes more green," explains David Howard, the project manager with Hatch + Ulland Owen who worked on the DeMeo house from the start of construction in summer 2006. "It's just the right way to do things. We used what he gave us," he adds about Bill's penchant for online purchases. "It's kind of interesting to have to work with pieces. The reuse of materials is the best part of this home."

Even the home site was reused. The DeMeos purchased an old home on five acres in the hills in West Austin in 2004 when they moved from Florida. They tore the house down but recycled most of its materials, including the concrete slab beneath the new home. "Working with an existing foundation can be difficult," says Howard. "But it's also a structure that you have to work within, which is nice." The former house faced north, as does the new home, which allowed Bill and Diane to install a 17-foot-tall wall



LEFT: The homeowners' favorite view of their home is from the front yard at night when the house lights up like a lantern. ABOVE: Custom millwork by a local woodworker hides an appliance garage and spice rack drawer next to the stove.

of windows and sliding glass doors in the main living area, connecting the inside to the heavily treed land outside (the windows are low-E glass to help control temperature). “The design just seems right,” says Howard. “But the property itself also seems to fit. With the windows, they can sit and watch everything outdoors,” including deer that walk right up to the yard’s fence and owls that live on the wooded lot.

The interior fits the couple as well. “I didn’t want to be banished to the kitchen, so we put it in the middle of the house,” Diane says. It’s centered between the living and dining areas in the main living space, and the maple cabinets and stainless steel appliances create a clean, muted palette. A concrete floor anchors the entire room, extending into the hallway that flows into the main living space. An immense front door made of steel and patterned glass enters into that hallway, which also serves as a gallery for artwork from generations of Diane’s family. The bedrooms, office and bathrooms are all accessed from the main hallway.

“The slippery slope that we created is, once you design a custom house, then you design custom furniture,” says Bill. Adjacent to the house is a work shed that holds all of his tools and building materials. Since officially moving into the home in July 2007, Bill has built a custom bed from a pecan tree and steel, a dining table from recycled wood and antique tractor parts and a coffee table from an old wooden door and scrap metal.

Sustainable home building comes in a variety of forms, even if it means scouring eBay listings or yard sales for the best building materials and inspiration. The house is, for a couple who met in New York City, the space they always hoped to build, reminiscent of the large, open loft spaces of an urban city but set in a natural, relaxing environment. Bill and Diane joke that they never intended to build a green home, never intended to create a responsible, eco-conscious house that integrated today’s best technologies in sustainable building. Instead, they built a home that fit their style—and it just so happened to be green. amh