

feature home





GREEN *and* GRACIOUS



**Architect Thomas Beck
built his green home in Estes Park a
decade before green building was trendy
to prove that energy efficiency and
tasteful design could go
hand in hand.**

PHOTOS BY RON FORTH

By Lisa Marshall

Long before green was the new black and the word eco-friendly was omnipresent, an idealistic young CU architecture student named Thomas Beck embarked on a quiet mission to spread the word about sustainable building.

The year was 1974, and the nation was reeling under the Arab oil embargo, with mandatory gas rationing, a maximum 55-mph speed limit, and year-round daylight saving time in place to save energy. Beck attended the National Solar Energy Conference in Denver and walked away with an insight that has since guided his career: "I realized that



Left: Thick wooden beams stretch out like tree branches in this Estes Park home's great room.

Below: A century-old railroad trestle from the Great Salt Lake was recycled to make the great room's trusses. Other woods came from standing dead cherry, walnut and ash trees from a family farm in Indiana.



oil and gas are not infinite,” says Beck, founder of T.W. Beck Architects in Estes Park. “We are just too wasteful, and we don’t have to be.”

For more than 30 years, Beck, now 52, has built a career around those ideas, designing solar- and wind-powered homes with recycled materials and energy-efficient appliances, even when green

building was anything but trendy. (He notes that while President Jimmy Carter put solar collectors on the White House in the '70s, President Ronald Reagan removed them when oil prices retreated in the '80s).

Beck also built his own sustainable dream home. It's a 5,800-square-foot model of possibility that boasts wind and

solar power, recycled tile and insulation, sustainably harvested wood and other energy-efficient technologies—all without sacrificing aesthetics.

“I wanted to demonstrate that you could have an energy-efficient home and green-built products, and that it didn't have to look weird,” says Beck, standing outside his elegant stone-and-stucco home, which



Above: Eco-minded architect Thomas Beck integrated solar roof tiles into the design of his elegant stone-and-stucco home.

Below: Two small windmills help provide electricity for the 5,800-square-foot home.



is powered by seamlessly integrated solar roof tiles and two miniature windmills.

Step inside, and you'll find not only a testament to Beck's dedication to green building, but an example of what can happen when two diverse design styles collide. In 1999, the Colorado architect was at a reunion in his hometown of Shelbyville, Ind., when he bumped into a kindergarten chum, Anne DePrez, whom he hadn't seen in decades. Soon afterward, Beck, a bearded outdoorsman who loves to swim and ski moguls, and DePrez, an Indiana trial lawyer who loves to read and play piano, were planning their wedding and scouting for property in Colorado. They found a wooded, 40-acre oasis high above the town of Estes Park, and quickly agreed that with the closest power pole located 2 miles away, an off-the-grid power system was necessary.

When the design process began, however, the couple's differing tastes became apparent. She was a traditionalist; he preferred a lodge look. She preferred Asian art and vibrant hues; he preferred earthy, natural tones. After months at the drawing board, Beck—who served in the challenging triple role of "architect, general contractor and husband"—created a hybrid that reflected both of them.

"He created a marriage of our preferences," DePrez says simply.

Below and right: Beck melded his love of the lodge look with his wife's preference for traditional and Asian styles, while capitalizing on the home's incredible mountain vistas accentuated by the many windows.



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In the spirit of Frank Lloyd Wright, Beck designed their home to fit its unique surroundings, with enormous west-facing windows overlooking what is arguably the best possible view of Rocky Mountain National Park. "The Lord gets credit for this part," says Beck, standing on his awe-inspiring deck with nearly 270-degree views from Longs Peak in the south to Mount Olympus in the north.

Among the home's more unusual features is a 30-foot-tall, windmill-sporting log bridge that leads from the north side of the house to a rocky outcrop, where the couple's golf tee box and wood-fired hot tub reside.

Inside the home's towering great room (designed to optimize acoustics for DePrez's mini grand piano), thick wooden beams branch out into a tree motif, making visitors feel as if they're standing beneath a wooded canopy. Bookshelves (for her) abound in nearly every upstairs room, while downstairs, a lap pool (for him) doubles as a home humidifier and water tank in case of fire.

When it came time to pick the home's

color scheme, the couple chose colors from some of the large Tibetan rugs found in nearly every room, including the deep blues, maroons and greens that reminded them of Asia (her favorite travel destination) for the upstairs master bedroom and bath. In the mid-level kitchen, earthy slate and concrete tile offer lodge-like ambience.

Lightening the Load

From the get-go, Beck was meticulous about saving energy, recycling materials, running a solar-powered job site and keeping waste in check. "The guys would throw lumber out and I'd throw it back at them," he jokes.

To keep new timber purchases to a minimum, Beck harvested standing dead cherry, walnut and ash trees from his family's Indiana farm. He then took the wood to a sawmill and hauled it to Colorado to use for the home's doors and trim. For the great-room trusses, he recycled a century-old railroad trestle from the Great Salt Lake. In the master bathroom, he chose deep-blue tile crafted from recycled windshield glass. For insulation, he used naturally treated shredded blue jeans. And he based every decision on energy efficiency.



Standing on the log bridge by his home's windmills, architect Thomas Beck says he believes the public will start demanding energy-efficient options once they understand how easily they can be incorporated into everyday life.

Below: A rocky outcrop that holds the couple's wood-fired hot tub is connected to the main house by a log bridge.



Beck built an environmentally friendly house that looks and functions normally. Earthy slate and concrete tiles lend lodge-like ambiance to the kitchen.



The downstairs lap pool serves as a humidifier and water tank in case of fire.