

High-Performance Modular Homes

This system was green before green was in.

Let's March of 2007 and Alden and Carol Hathaway haven't received an electric bill in seven months. That's because their six-year-old home in Virginia is equipped with an array of solar panels that keeps the home powered for months at a time.

In 2001, the Hathaways started out on the journey to build a solar-powered home using modular technology. Before the Hathaways' new home was set on their five-acre building site in Loudoun County, VA, their home was on display on the Mall of our nation's capital in Washington, DC. Called the Solar Patriot for

with a traditional grid hookup to power their 3,000-sq.-ft. modular home. This is combined with an array of energy-efficient appliances and a solar hot water heating system. For many of the same reasons—efficiency, quality, less impact to the planet—Hathaway chose modular technology to make it happen. AvisAmerica (Avis, PA) and Bradley Builders & Developers (Philadelphia, PA) built the two-story home to Energy Star performance standards.

"It seems so absurd to me that more builders and buyers aren't interested in the modular system of construction. We don't buy



Courtesy of Alden Hathaway

the event, the demonstration home was part of a concerted effort to alert lawmakers and the general public to the benefits of solar energy and the modular building system.

FINE-TUNING PERFORMANCE

"The home is performing even better today than when we first set it," says Alden Hathaway, who offers a PowerPoint presentation on the process. Hathaway has also written a book, available for free at ert.net/solarhome, on his family's journey.

"We had to fine tune some of the systems, because they were fighting each other at first. The geothermal and solar hot water supplementing heater were overriding each other. But once we got that sorted out, the home performed really well. The other interesting thing is my daughters have left for college. It's amazing how much energy teenagers require. Now that they are away at college, our energy usage has dropped tremendously. We are now a near zero-energy home."

Alden Hathaway is the first to admit he's an environmentalist. His goal is to burn far less fossil fuel to power his new home. With today's new solar technologies, we can live the same lifestyle with very little planetary impact, Hathaway maintains.

"I just know from my work as an engineer that there are environmentally and economically sound solutions to many of the energy issues we face today as a society. The bottom line is that we have choices as consumers," says Hathaway, director of energy programs at the Environmental Resources Trust (Washington, DC). He admits it was a challenge providing enough energy for his family over the years, particularly since teenage girls "need" hair dryers.

That's why Hathaway chose photovoltaic cells in conjunction

our vehicles from some guy who is building it outdoors. Why would we entrust the largest purchase of our lifetimes, our homes, with someone who's building it outside? Why would anyone choose that method over the controlled environment of a factory, where there is a much lower tolerance for errors and a higher degree of precision?"

SAVINGS BUILT-IN

Hathaway says the savings of modular technology offset the increase in cost for solar power. "The cost of the system all told

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