

# ROOTS TO ROOFS

HOMES, GARDENS, REAL ESTATE AND  
SUSTAINABILITY IN THE YAMHILL VALLEY

A clear glass filled with water sits on a textured, greyish surface. A dark brown branch with several light pink cherry blossoms and buds is placed inside the glass, with the water level reaching about halfway up. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light green.

*Ideas  
in bloom*

*Projects and plans  
abound as spring unfurls*



Marcus Larson/News-Register

John Mead of Cellar Ridge Construction explains that large south-facing windows let in sunlight that keeps the bedroom toasty warm.

# LET THE SUNSHINE IN

*Builders, homeowners wrapping up passive solar project in McMinnville*

By **STARLA POINTER**  
Of the News-Register

On a bright but chilly February afternoon, sun poured through the large south-facing windows of the certified “passive house” being built in central McMinnville.

It was almost too warm inside. That’s because the house was already doing its job of capturing and retaining winter heat, but the air exchange system, and other elements designed to keep the interior fresh and comfort-

able, were not yet hooked up.

By late March, homeowners John and Debbie Pitney expect to wrap up the year-long planning and building project. The Pitneys will move their navy blue couch into the living room, unpack their boxes and start living in what Cellar Ridge Construction calls “the most efficient home ever built in McMinnville, by far.”

John Mead, co-owner of the company, explained that the Pitneys’ new house will meet standards developed

in Germany that provide 90 percent more efficiency than conventional construction.

That far exceeds the 30 to 50 percent gain achieved through typical “green” building standards in the U.S. But Mead thinks the more efficient standards will be in common use here within a decade.

The so-called “Passivhaus standards” call for super-insulated walls, extra insulation beneath the slab and in the attic, and joints tight enough to

stop any leaks.

Mead noted that his company used Henry’s Blueskin membrane to wrap the 13-inch thick exterior walls. It self-seals after being penetrated by fasteners, so even tiny gaps around screws and nails are eliminated.

That’s why the 1,000-square-foot house feels so warm on a winter day.

In fact, the Passivhaus design is so efficient, there’s no need for a separate heating system. Sunlight and heat from lights, appliances and occupants



Opposite: **Conor Manfrin and Robert Herrington of Cellar Ridge Construction measure and cut siding for the garage.**

Right: **The passive solar house features metal siding and a metal roof, which will capture rain for reuse. The homeowners also loved the covered entryway with cedar siding.**

Marcus Larson/News-Register

typically keep the space warm enough.

Thinking about the efficiency of their new home warms the Pitneys' hearts. They're eager to settle in.

"We've moved four times since June," Debbie said. "I'm looking forward to having an awesome place to live."

She recalled how they moved out of their house in Eugene and relocated to McMinnville to build an eco-friendly house. Both retired Methodist ministers, they wanted a dwelling that fit their lifelong quest for social and environmental justice.

"For us, being responsible for the Earth has always been part of our world as people of faith," John Pitney



said shortly after ground was broken in September.

They started by buying a 1939 dwelling in an established neighborhood. They disassembled it themselves, saving as much wood as they could.

That reclaimed Douglas fir has become part of their new house. John

Pitney used it to make trim and window frames and to build vanities for the two bathrooms.

The Pitneys have been involved in the entire project, Mead said.

He joked that he never has trouble tracking down the homeowners when he needs them to make a choice or answer a question. "They're always

here," he said.

That's a positive thing, Mead said. "I love so many things about this house," he said, but if he has to choose a favorite aspect, it's that "John and Debbie have been so hands-on."

In addition to John working with the reclaimed wood, the couple installed the cork flooring, recycled glass



Above: Homeowners John and Debbie Pitney helped install the kitchen, including cabinets from IKEA and recycled glass countertops.

Right: The Pitneys will install two huge tanks to collect rainwater for reuse. They plan to disguise the tanks with siding and foliage, so they'll blend into the residential area better.

Opposite: Walls are 13 inches thick, including plenty of insulation and a self-sealing waterproof membrane beneath the siding.

Marcus Larson/News-Register





kitchen countertops and birch kitchen cabinets. They placed terra cotta tiles on bathroom floors and beside sliding doors in the living room and master bedroom. And on that sunny February afternoon, Debbie was assembling the light fixture that will hang over their dining table.

She said they're looking forward to working outside once the house is finished. They intend to plant fruit trees and put in a garden. They'll also use landscaping techniques to soften the appearance of the metal siding and two 4,500-gallon rain catchment tanks, which will be filled partly by runoff from the red metal roof.

The roof stretches over both the living area and the garage, plus a spacious covered entryway lined with cedar, a natural contrast to the silvery metal that covers the rest of the structure. Skylights, suggested by the Pitneys' daughter, turn the entryway into an outdoor living space, Debbie said.

She said she loves the entryway, the open-plan design, the high ceilings ... everything about her soon-to-be home.

"It's what I pictured," she said. "It's such fun to see it come alive."