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'We will make electricity so cheap that only the rich will burn candles.' —Thomas Edison, 1879

# STEALTHY GREEN HOMES



**POWER PLANT**  
A meter shows if the home generates more energy than it uses.



**ROOF AT WORK**  
Solar panels generate electricity, allowing the homeowners to sell energy back to the grid.



**THICK SKIN**  
The tightly insulated home has wall panels like the ones above to minimize the loss of warm or cool air.



THE ECO-DESIGN ISSUE



**GAUGED** Energy usage at the four-bedroom can be tracked on a laptop.



**AIR APPARENT**  
A control panel for the home's ventilation system, which monitors the use of outside air.



**ACCIDENTALLY ECO-FRIENDLY**  
David and Martha Gurzick of Frederick, Md., weren't looking for a green home but are now happy with their home's money-saving features.

T-B: Eli Meir Kaplan for The Wall Street Journal (7); Gary Konkol Top illustration by Sanna Mander

Net-zero homes that generate much or all of their electricity are moving beyond the 'crunchy-granola types' and attracting more mainstream buyers who want to slash their utility bills; feeling cozy on 5-degree days

BY CECILIE ROHWEDDER

**DAVID AND MARTHA GURZICK** bought their new home for its historic neighborhood and closeness to the cafes and antique stores of downtown Frederick, Md.

Now they are also warming to the utility bills. The Gurzicks live in a so-called net-zero energy house—a home so energy-efficient that over the course of a year, its electricity consumption is expected to be zero.

The four-bedroom brick house includes energy-eating creature comforts, such as a steam room and an extra-large washer and dryer. But when the sun shines on the solar panels and the Gurzicks are at work, the house produces more energy than it consumes. At those times, the electricity meter is running backward, and the couple is selling energy back to the grid.



**NATURALLY WARM**

Gary Konkol's house in chilly Hudson, Wis., doesn't have a furnace.

The Gurzicks, who paid \$516,000 for the 2,800-square-foot home, moved in last December. "It was never our intention to get a green home, but these features are the icing on the cake," said Mr. Gurzick, who is 35 and teaches management at Hood College.

Extreme energy efficiency is moving mainstream, becoming standard practice for large home builders, such as California-based KB Home and Nexus Energy Homes, the company that built the Gurzicks' house last year.

The "green" residential construction market has grown steadily in recent years—even throughout the recession. Green housing projects accounted for 20% of all newly built homes last year and had an overall value of \$25 billion, according to industry-research firm McGraw Hill Construction. As the housing market continues to recover, the researchers predict, this share will grow to between 29%

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## THE \$500,000 HOUSECLEANING

When a Virginia couple discovered that their townhouse was infested with mold, it was the start of an arduous, expensive multiyear cleanup

BY SANETTE TANAKA

**JENNY GUINNESS OF** McLean, Va., waited as men in moon suits cut away chunks of drywall in 2-foot increments. They would bag and seal the material, and start again. Soon they had removed the walls of an entire room. A mold remediation sat her down and said: "I have really bad news for you. This looks like it goes in every direction...I think you need to have a demolition company come in and start removing whole

walls because I can't see an end to it anywhere."

In 2008, Ms. Guinness and her husband, Os, discovered that their townhouse in a suburb of Washington was contaminated with stachybotrys—also known as black mold. That launched a painstaking five-year renovation that cost as much as the couple originally paid for the house and involved ripping out walls, replacing many of the finishes and sterilizing nearly every surface and item they owned.

What they couldn't clean, they threw away,

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