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THIS PAGE: Hacienda Verde © Greg Warden

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HACIENDA VERDE WHERE GREEN DESIGN MAKES ITSELF AT HOME

WHEN BRIAN PLASTER MOVED BACK TO THE NEIGHBORHOOD WHERE HE GREW UP, HE BROUGHT SOME VERY NEW, AND ECO-FRIENDLY, DESIGN IDEAS WITH HIM.

"I went to fifth grade at the neighborhood school down the street," he says standing in front of his newly completed home. Plaster, vice president of operations for Signature Custom Homes, a division of his family's homebuilding business, also wanted to put his money where his mouth is. "I was also encouraging my clients to build green, so eventually I had to take on this project for myself," he explains.

The result of these efforts is Hacienda Verde, the home Plaster shares with his wife, Maggie, and their two young children. The two-story, 4,475-square-foot home was built under the Southern Nevada Home Builders Association's Green Building Partnership. Hacienda Verde was also awarded the U.S. Green Building Council's highest Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Certification, Platinum. The home is only the 16th LEED Platinum home in Nevada and the 716th nationwide.

Earning points for LEED certification is accomplished in many different ways throughout the home. The home utilizes Southern Nevada's most abundant renewable resource, the sun, for energy. Information about how much energy is being produced is easily available in real time on Plaster's iPhone via his SunPower application.

In addition, the home harnesses the sun for natural light throughout the home because of the orientation of the structure to the light. Solatubes allow the sun to illuminate areas that might otherwise be dark, like closets and bathrooms. Sky lights in the family's living room are not fixed—they open and close which allows them act as ventilation on comfortable Mojave Desert days. Lights used throughout the home are compact fluorescent and all are on dimmer switches. Since moving into the home in November, the Plasters have paid only \$24.50 for power.

THIS PAGE FROM LEFT: Family kitchen; the Plaster's dining and living rooms © Greg Warden

Indoor air quality is important in Hacienda Verde. Light switches in bathrooms are linked to ventilation fans which come on whenever lights are turned on. Fans turn off automatically after five minutes. "Once an hour the fans run for five minutes, too, which improve indoor air quality because you're constantly venting out stale air," Plaster says.

A central vacuum system removes dust and allergens from the home where traditional vacuum models leave those particles within the home. Ventilation in the garage is also key to air quality. As Plaster explains, "Our cars off-gas for 10 to 30 minutes after we turn them off. We have a ventilation fan that is triggered by a motion detector when we open the garage door to vent those emissions out." As paints and finishes are known to continue releasing low-level toxic emissions for years after their application, the Plasters chose low volatile organic compound (VOC) paints to be used throughout the home.

If all this focus on air quality seems like overkill, keep in mind that this is, after all, a family home. Keeping their children healthy and happy is a priority for the Plasters. And while a tankless water heater and energy efficient cellulose insulation made from recycled newsprint

make the home green, Hacienda Verde doesn't necessarily look like the stereotypical green home. The home is warm and inviting, family-friendly. Simple touches throughout keep the focus on the family environment—racks, drawers, and shelving in the kids' closets are lowered to kid-friendly heights. Both of the children's bathrooms feature tiny little toilets that are just the right size to help them become potty pros.

And the reality of living in any home isn't necessarily about the unseen green features. As Maggie Plaster says, "We were in 1,400 square feet before. We didn't have a yard. It was cramped. This is healthier for the kids, not just the air quality and being a green home, but they have room to run around." She also says that the new home's larger living space has benefited their family's social life. "We entertain so much more now. Now we're the center of the whole Plaster family."

To learn more about Hacienda Verde and to see photos of the home during construction, visit signaturecustom.com.